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by

Gladys Ruth Bridgham

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T. S. Denison & Company, Publishers
623 S. Wabash Ave. CHICAGO

MOTHER MINE

A Play that Reaches the Heart

In Three Acts

BY

GLADYS RUTH BRIDGHAM

AUTHOR OF

"Way Down Along," "Step Lively,"
"The Thirteenth Star," etc.

CHICAGO
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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1922

"I can just remember two loving blue eyes, and a warm cheek pressed close to mine. I can still taste the salt of tears. That must have been my Mother."

NOTICE

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GLADYS RUTH BRIDGHAM
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MOTHER MINE

FOR SIX MEN AND SIX WOMEN

CHARACTERS.

(*In the order in which they appear or speak.*)

CYNTHIA WHITCOMB.....*The Deacon's Wife*
MIRANDA PEASLEY.....*"Mother Mine"*
MARTHA TISDALE.....*A Neighbor*
LETTIE HOLCOMB.....*With a Nose for News*
LILLIAN WHITCOMB.....*The Deacon's Daughter*
MARY TISDALE.....*Martha's Daughter*
JOHN WHITCOMB.....*The Deacon*
JACK PAYSON.....*The Merchant's Son*
JOE PAYSON.....*The Merchant*
JERRY MACCONNELL.....*The Newcomer*
OFFICER LEWIS.....*From Boston*
SAM BLUNT.....*The Constable*

PLACE—*The entire action of the play occurs in the sitting room of Miranda Peasley's home in Tapley Village, Maine.*

TIME—*The Present.*

TIME OF PLAYING—*About Two Hours.*

SYNOPSIS.

ACT I. An evening late in August.
ACT II. Three weeks later than ACT I.
ACT III. Two days later than ACT II.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS.

MIRANDA—A sweet little woman of the old-fashioned type, made up to appear about 50 years old. She must represent the type of woman whose heart remains warm and youthful through the years, always in perfect sympathy and understanding with the joys and sorrows of young people. She is bright and happy and altogether wholesome, yet there is an underlying touch of wistfulness in her character. She is just the sort whom any fellow could well be proud to hail as "Mother Mine!" Her white hair is done in curls, not of the old-maid corkscrew type, but in soft ringlets. She wears a black silk dress with white collar and cuffs for Act I; house dress and gingham apron for Act II; black dress and white cap and apron for Act III.

CYNTHIA WHITCOMB and MARTHA TISDALE—Country women about 45 years old. Dressed up for the wedding with wraps to put on off stage, in Act I; everyday apparel for Acts II and III.

LETTIE HOLCOMB—A maiden lady of uncertain years with a highly developed sense of curiosity. Her taste in dress runs to bright colors. Her wedding finery for Act I should be rather extreme, but not burlesque.

LILLIAN WHITCOMB—Has been away to school in Boston. She is about 18 years old. She wears up-to-date clothes. White dress for Act I; linen suit and straw hat for Act II; taffeta travelling dress and hat for Act III.

MARY TISDALE—A very pretty girl about 16 years old. She is of the shy, sweet type. Simple white dress for Act I; gingham dress for Act II; blue serge dress for Act III.

JOHN WHITCOMB—A stern man, but one who tries to deal fairly with friend and enemy alike; about 50 years

old. Wears his "Sunday best" for Act I; brown linen suit for Acts II and III.

Jack Payson—A likeable college boy, about 21 years old. Wears up-to-date suits for Acts I and III; blue overalls and a red cap for Act II.

Joe Payson—A shrewd trader and a hard loser; about 50 years old. Wears a common suit, unpressed and rather shabby, for Acts I and III; a white linen duster over his suit in Act II.

Jerry MacConnell—Happy-go-lucky and of limited education, but with a high sense of honor, and thoroughly likeable; about 17 years old. He is made up to look thin and pale in Act I, and with a trace of it still remaining in Act II; healthy tan in Act III. Wears shabby suit and cap for Act I; blue overalls and red cap, similar to Jack's, for Act II; strictly up-to-date suit and cap for Act III.

Officer Lewis—Not a burlesque detective, but a likeable, though firm, individual; about 35 years old. Neat blue suit and straw hat.

Sam Blunt—Not a burlesque "constabule," but simply rather dense, though with good intentions. Blue or brown suit, black felt hat.

PERSONAL PROPERTIES.

CYNTHIA—Bag of rice.

MIRANDA—Glass of milk; dish of bread and cold meat; tin basin; towel; bandage; handkerchief; glass of milk; plate of gingerbread; stack of dishes to carry.

MARTHA—Old shoe.

LETTIE—Lighted lamp.

LILLIAN—Rose; sealed envelope.

MARY—Rose; tablespread; dish towel.

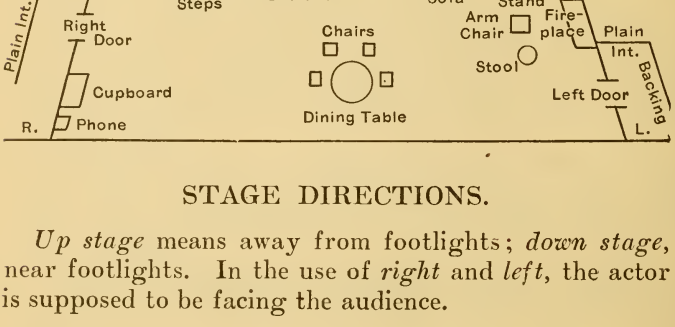
JACK—Sealed envelope.

JOE—Fountain pen; paper to sign.

JERRY—Letter in envelope; package with lace collar; pot of tea.

For stage properties, see descriptions of stage settings.

SCENE PLOT.



STAGE DIRECTIONS.

Up stage means away from footlights; *down stage*, near footlights. In the use of *right* and *left*, the actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

MOTHER MINE

The Scene represents the sitting room of Miranda Peasley's home in Tapley Village, early in an evening in the latter part of August. In the center of the rear wall there is an outside door. A door in the left wall, near the footlights, is supposed to lead into the parlor, and a door in the right wall, near the back, is supposed to lead into the kitchen. (These two doorways may remain open throughout the play.) In the rear wall, at the right of the outside door, there is an opening approached by four steps which lead to a platform, and from this landing more steps lead up and off stage, to the right. (NOTE: *If impracticable to include the stairway in the setting, use the door down left instead as an approach to the upper part of the house, and have only the three entrances first mentioned.*)

Left of the center door is a window, hung with white muslin curtains, through which a bit of country landscape is visible. A bird cage with a canary hangs in the window, and under the window is an old-fashioned sofa, upholstered in red. Against the left wall up stage is a fireplace, in front of which is a comfortable arm chair with a footstool. Over the fireplace hangs the framed portrait of a middle-aged man in the uniform of the Grand Army of the Republic. A pair of lighted candles and matches are on the mantlepiece. A small table, with a family album and a magazine or two, is in the corner between the fireplace and the window. Against the right wall, near the audience, is a china cupboard with dishes, and a telephone is on the wall alongside. Above the landing (or on the wall) is a motto, "God Bless Our Home." At the foot of the

stairs (or against the wall) is a small stand with a reading lamp. In the center of the room are chairs and a round dining-room table, spread with a cloth and containing the remains of a wedding supper. A large paper wedding bell hangs in the center doorway, with paper streamers which lead to the dining table. The room is decorated with flowers and paper streamers and garlands. On the sofa is a cloth to be thrown over the bird cage. The outside door is open.

Off stage back right is an auto horn. Off stage down left, near door, is a clock to strike ten. Off stage down right is a telephone bell to ring.

LIGHTS: *Stage lights up full at rise. Rose-colored bunches back of rear flat, shining in door and window. Shortly after rise, gradually blend bunch lights from rose (sunset) to blue (moonlight), retaining blue bunches for balance of act.*

When the curtain rises, MIRANDA, MARTHA *and* CYNTHIA *are on the stage.* MIRANDA *stands in the doorway, her left side toward the audience, looking outside and off right.* MARTHA, *holding an old shoe, stands just back of her, looking out over* MIRANDA'S *shoulder.* CYNTHIA, *with a paper bag of rice in her hand, is kneeling on the sofa and looking out of the window. All three are excited. There is a murmur of friendly but excited voices off stage. An automobile horn is sounded off right, and voices are heard calling a confusion of farewells, such as, "Good luck!" "Good-bye!" "Don't forget to write!" "So long, Anna!" "Doesn't she look sweet!" etc.* CYNTHIA *begins the dialogue just after the horn is sounded.* (NOTE: *The off stage murmur should be kept subdued, so that the dialogue will be heard distinctly.*)

CYNTHIA (*throwing some rice out of the window, calls*). There they go!

MARTHA (*throwing the old shoe out of the door, calls*). Good luck!

MIRANDA (*after a brief moment*). Land sakes! They won't get the rice outen their clothes for a year.

(*The clamor outside dies away.*)

CYNTHIA (*turning from the window*). Well, they're gone at last.

(MARTHA *turns idly away from the door, leaving* MIRANDA *there alone.*)

A WOMAN'S VOICE (*from outside*). Good night, Mirandy.

MIRANDA (*to someone outside*). Oh, are you going? All of you? Won't you come in again?

MIXED VOICES OUTSIDE (*all speaking together*).
No thank you.
No, it's getting late.
It was lovely, Miss Miranda.
Good night. (*Etc.*)

MIRANDA (*replying*). Good night; good night. (*Turns and comes forward into the room, leaving the door open.*) Well, that's over.

CYNTHIA. And how you can be so cheerful about it!

MARTHA (*wiping her eyes*). Well, goodness knows I don't know what we're crying for. If ever a girl made a good match, it's Anna.

MIRANDA. Yes. Ben's a real likely boy and I reckon he's going to make a good man. I'm real happy for Anna.

MARTHA. You're the most unselfish woman, Mirandy. Brought up those three girls just as if they was your

own, and now every one's got married and gone away to live.

MIRANDA (*looks toward picture over mantel and smiles*). I got married once upon a time and went away.

MARTHA. Well, I only hope I can be as brave when my Mary wants to go. Maybe if they'd been your own girls it would have come harder to you.

MIRANDA. More'n likely it would, Marthy.

CYNTHIA (*to* MARTHA). You don't need to worry. Your Mary'll never get a chance to have a beau while her pa lives.

LETTIE *enters, center, from outside.*

MARTHA. Oh, don't say that, Cynthy; though Hiram does say there ain't a man on earth good enough for Mary.

LETTIE. Hi better look out. Mary'll be jest the one to take up with a crooked stick.

MIRANDY. Lettie, how you talk!

LETTIE. Never knew it to fail. There was Lucy Sears and Carrie Holt and—

MIRANDA. For goodness sake, forget about them, Lettie.

CYNTHIA. What are you going to do now, Mirandy?

LETTIE. Yes, that's jest what I've been a wonderin'. You can't live here alone.

CYNTHIA. No, indeed.

MARTHA. Of course not.

(*The above two speeches are made at one time.*)

MIRANDA (*thoughtfully*). I wish I had a baby.

MARTHA, LETTIE and CYNTHIA (*together, at the top of their voices*). A baby?

MARTHA. Well, did I ever!

LETTIE. Be you crazy?

CYNTHIA. What do you mean?

MIRANDA (*calmly*). Jest what I said. I didn't mean to get you all stirred up. I was jest sort of thinking to myself. I really didn't mean to say it, but it's the truth. I've wanted a baby all my life.

LETTIE. Well, I should think after being a mother to your sister's girls for nigh on to ten years—

MIRANDA (*interrupting*). I want a boy.

MARTHA, LETTIE and CYNTHIA (*together*). A boy?

MIRANDA (*laughing*). You're for all the world like three parrots.

MARTHA, LETTIE and CYNTHIA (*together, astonished*). Parrots?

LETTIE (*with a gasp*). What ever in the world do you want of a boy?

CYNTHIA (*with a sudden idea*). Why, to do her chores, of course. That's what she means.

MIRANDA. No, it ain't what I mean. I want a son. There ain't a woman on earth who, down deep in her heart, doesn't want a son.

MARTHA (*slowly*). I believe you're right. Jest the same as every man wants a daughter.

MIRANDA. And what's more, I'm going to have one.

CYNTHIA. Well, I'm beat!

LETTIE. Miranda, you're plumb outen your head. You don't know what you're talking about.

MIRANDA. Somewhere out in the world, there's a boy without any mother, who would like to live with a mother who ain't got any boy.

MARTHA. You mean you're going to adopt a baby boy?

MIRANDA. That's what I'm thinking about.

LETTIE. Mirandy! At your age! It's ridiculous.

You've spent just about all you've got on the girls, and now to spend the rest on a young one who ain't no relation to you at all—well, I ain't got any words to discuss my feelings!

MIRANDA (*dryly*). The situation must be unusual.

LETTIE. No one ever heard the like.

CYNTHIA. Where do you expect to find this baby?

MIRANDA. I ain't the least idea, Cynthy. I ain't worrying about that. I'm going to let the Lord send him.

LETTIE. Mirandy Peasley! You ought to be took care of. All this excitement has unsettled your mind.

MIRANDA. No, it's done jest the other thing. It's settled it. Don't get scared, Lettie. I ain't likely to get violent.

LETTIE. Well, I don't suppose you are. But I never heard such crazy talk in all my born days.

MIRANDA. If we got a right desire in our hearts, Lettie, the Lord knows it. And He'll take care of it, and we don't have to worry about how He's going to do it.

LILLIAN *enters through the open doorway at center, followed by* MARY.

LILLIAN. Well, it's all over, Miss Miranda. Shall we help you clear up?

MARTHA. Of course.

CYNTHIA. What we been thinking of?

LETTIE. We all will.

(*They start to pick up the dishes from the table.*)

MIRANDA. No, no, it's getting late. We'll jest carry this mess into the kitchen and clear up in the morning.

(CYNTHIA *and* LETTIE *go out, right, carrying things into the kitchen.*)

MARTHA. Mary can come over and help you. (*Exit right with dishes.*)

MARY. Yes, I'd love to.

MIRANDA. And I'd love to have you.

LILLIAN (*at table with* MIRANDA, *gathering dishes*). Wasn't it a grand success?

MIRANDA. It certainly was. And you young folks deserve all the credit. You made the prettiest wedding for my girlie. (*Exit right with dishes.*)

LETTIE *returns from the kitchen, bringing a lighted lamp which she places on the small table, up right.*

LILLIAN (*on way to kitchen with dishes, meeting* LETTIE). I got one of the bride's roses. (*Turns to show a rose pinned on her dress, and exit right.*)

MARY (*shyly*). So did I.

LETTIE (*sharply*). A lot o' good it will do either of you. You better hide them, or your pas will lock you both up in convents.

MARY *goes into the kitchen with dishes as* DEACON WHITCOMB *appears in the open door, from outside.*

WHITCOMB (*loudly*). Wal, you women folks going to stay all night?

CYNTHIA *enters from the kitchen, followed by* MARTHA, *while* WHITCOMB *is speaking.*

CYNTHIA. Is it getting late?

WHITCOMB. That's what it is. Henry is waiting for Marthy. Everyone else has gone home.

MIRANDA *enters from the kitchen, followed by* LILLIAN.

MARTHA. Mirandy is ready to drop.

(CYNTHIA, LETTIE *and* MARTHA *exeunt, left, to get their things.*)

MIRANDA. Oh, no I ben't.

(NOTE: *The above business of clearing the table, with its numerous exits and entrances, should be very thoroughly rehearsed so that no cues will be missed to retard the action of the play. If the table has not been completely cleared at this point,* MARY *may make one or more trips from and to the kitchen during the ensuing dialogue, to complete the work prior to her next regular entrance.*)

WHITCOMB. You going to stay alone tonight, Mirandy?

MIRANDA. Of course I be.

LETTIE *enters from the left with her wraps.*

WHITCOMB. Don't you want one of the girls to stay with you?

LETTIE. I'll stay. I can, just as well as not.

LILLIAN. I'd jest as soon.

MIRANDA. Not the least mite o' need o' sech foolishness.

CYNTHIA *and* MARTHA *enter from the left with their wraps.*

LILLIAN. Just for tonight, until you get used to it?

MIRANDA. Might jest as well get used to it tonight as any time.

MARTHA. And you don't want no one to stay?

MIRANDA. No.

LETTIE. You always was terrible sot. Might jest as well save our breath as waste it talking to you.

MIRANDA (*smiling*). Better, Lettie; much better.

WHITCOMB. Ain't you coming, Lillian?

LILLIAN. Mary and I are going to stay with Miss Miranda for a while. And then I'm staying over night with Mary.

WHITCOMB. That's what you'll be doing the whole summer. Well, I hope you'll stay over night with us

once in a while. Your mother and I would like to get acquainted with you again.

LILLIAN (*laughing*). Oh, dad, it's not quite as bad as that, is it? I don't have to go back to school next year. I can stay home if you want me to, you know.

WHITCOMB (*emphatically*). No, I don't know. You started in to get an education, and there ain't nothing going to interfere with it. You understand what I am saying to you? (*He goes to the door.*)

LILLIAN (*unimpressed*). Yes, father. Don't worry. I won't let any thing interfere with your plans for my future. (*Turns to* CYNTHIA *and kisses her.*) Good night, mother.

LETTIE. Good night, Mirandy.

CYNTHIA. We had a lovely time.

MARTHA. Wouldn't have missed it for the world.

(*The three kiss* MIRANDA *and exeunt, center.*)

MIRANDA (*calls after them*). Good night.

WHITCOMB (*from the door*). Anything I can do for you, Miranda? You know where I live.

MIRANDA. Thank you, deacon.

WHITCOMB. Don't you girls stay here half the night and then start home alone.

LILLIAN. No, father. We'll be careful.

WHITCOMB (*curtly*). I wish I thought so. (*Exits, center.*)

MARY *enters from the kitchen, bringing a fancy spread for the dining room table, which is now clear. She and* MIRANDA *adjust the spread on the table, while* LILLIAN *goes to the window and looks out.* MIRANDA *gets the lamp from the side table.*

LILLIAN (*coming forward*). Miss Miranda, there's

a package on the back step. It should have been here for the wedding. May I bring it in?

MIRANDA. Why, of course.

LILLIAN *runs out right, into kitchen.*

MIRANDA. What is it, for the land's sakes? I never missed anything. Do you know what it is, Mary?

MARY (*smiling*). I think I can guess.

LILLIAN *enters from the kitchen, pulling* JACK PAYSON *after her.*

LILLIAN. All safe. Everyone has gone home.

MIRANDA (*turns and sees* JACK). Land o' Goshen! Jack Payson!

JACK (*puts his arms around her and kisses her*). Hello, Miss Miranda. Now, isn't this sweet of me, after the way you've slighted me tonight?

MIRANDA. Good land, Jack, I didn't know you had come home, and if I had, I couldn't have asked you. Why, the deacon was here and—(*stops and turns to* LILLIAN). Lillian Whitcomb, if your father knew you were in here with Jack—

LILLIAN (*interrupting*). But he d o e s n ' t know, and what he doesn't know won't hurt him.

JACK (*reproachfully*). You haven't gone back on me, Miss Mirandy? You know you always liked me.

MIRANDA. Of course I did, and I do now. I set the world by you, Jack. But the deacon doesn't. (*Sits back of dining table, facing audience.*)

JACK (*with a shout.*) You've said something.

LILLIAN (*ruefully*). And my father likes Jack as well as Jack's father likes me.

JACK. Isn't it idiotic?

LILLIAN. Silly as a Kentucky feud.

MARY (*to* MIRANDA). Couldn't y o u say something to Mr. Whitcomb and Mr. Payson?

MIRANDA. Me?

MARY. Yes. Everybody loves you so much; they would take anything from you.

MIRANDA. Well now, dearie, you've put me in a real hard position by saying that. I'll have to think whether I ought to say anything to them. I know love can do most anything. But goodness gracious, Deacon Whitcomb and Joe Payson—(*Shakes her head.*)

JACK (*grinning*). Can't exactly see them holding hands, can you?

MARY (*sighs*). And they've been like that ever since we were children.

MIRANDA (*thoughtfully*). Yes, the trouble started the winter Jack's grandmother fell downstairs and broke her wrist.

LILLIAN. Tell us about it, Miss Miranda. (*Sits at right of dining table.*)

JACK. Yes; what caused the feud? (*Sits at left of dining table.*)

MIRANDA. Well now, I don't know as I ought to revive what's be'n forgotten by most everyone except the deacon and Joe Payson. It was when they was giving the contract for the new school house. Your father, Lillian, was a contractor in them days. Well, when it come up to the council the deacon lost the contract. He was beaten by one vote. And he always maintained it was your father, Jack, that cast that vote. He accused him and they was high words. Your father didn't deny it. And the deacon and Joe Payson have be'n at daggers' points ever since.

(*During the above speech* MARY *sits at table between* MIRANDA *and* LILLIAN, *and listens to the ensuing dialogue with natural interest.*)

LILLIAN. How silly!

JACK. I'll say so. Well, Lillian and I have never had any trouble, and our folks can't keep us from being friends.

LILLIAN. You see, Miss Miranda, Jack and I have seen a lot of each other this last winter, both going away to school in the same city.

JACK (*eagerly*). We know each other a whole lot better than we ever did here at home.

MIRANDA (*with good-natured suspicion*). Are you children in love with each other? (*She looks from one to the other.*)

LILLIAN (*smiles and nods "yes"*). And we're going to be married some day.

JACK (*enthusiastically*). Just as soon as I can raise the money. And while we're away on our honeymoon, our folks can get used to the idea.

MIRANDA (*alarmed*). Tut, tut! You mustn't think of that, children.

JACK. Well, there's no immediate danger. Dad never lets me get my hands on a penny too much, and I work hard on the farm all through my vacation. It's a shame.

LILLIAN (*hopefully*). Well, our parents can't part us forever. And they needn't try. Even if they do keep their eagle eyes on us now while we're at home, we'll find a way.

MIRANDA. I wouldn't be a mite surprised.

LILLIAN. We're interested in some of the same subjects, and we've done some of our studying together. And (*eagerly*), oh, Miss Miranda, will you do something for us?

MIRANDA. Now, Lillian, you know I'd do anything on earth for you, or for Jack. But as for doing anything for the two of you together, I might be able to, and then again I might not. I guess it will depend.

JACK. I don't believe you'll object when you hear about it. You see, Lillian and I are interested in literary work and we've started a romance.

MIRANDA (*surprised*). I want to know!

JACK. And we want to finish it.

MIRANDA (*quickly*). And you want to do it here? (*Emphatically.*) 'Twouldn't never do in the world.

LILLIAN (*smoothly*). Not exactly that. We wouldn't come at the same time. I would do some writing and leave it here in the morning, and Jack could call later and get what I had written and leave what he had written. See?

MIRANDA (*considering*). Yes, and I don't see any earthly harm in it, either.

JACK. Of course there isn't. The harm would be in stopping our work when we are getting along so nicely. (*Winks at* LILLIAN.)

LILLIAN (*to* MIRANDA). Please say that we may. (*Takes* MIRANDA's *right hand.*)

JACK (*coaxing*). P l e a s e, Miss Miranda. (*Takes* MIRANDA's *left hand.*)

MIRANDA (*tossing their hands aside in pretended sternness*). Now, you stop, both of you! There isn't a boy or girl in this village who couldn't always wheedle the heart right out o' me. I'm that soft.

JACK. It isn't being soft, Miss Miranda.

MARY (*softly*). No, it's just love.

LILLIAN (*patting* MARY's *hand*). That's right, Mary.

MIRANDA (*desperately*). There you all go again. I don't know how I could refuse, no matter what it was. But I'm glad this is something sensible you are doing. I can help you without feeling that I'm not doing right by your folks. (*Rises.*)

LILLIAN. Then we may?

JACK. It's all right?

(LILLIAN *and* JACK *speak together, and rise.*)

MIRANDA. Why, yes. You'd be running in to see me, anyway, and I'll be sure now that you both come every day. Guess I'm going to gain by it, too.

JACK. Miss Miranda, you're a brick! (*Hugs her.*)

LILLIAN. That doesn't express it! (*Hugs her while* JACK *retains his embrace.*)

MARY (*rising*). We ought to be going, Lillian.

LILLIAN. Yes, we ought.

JACK. I'll go down the lane with you and then watch you the rest of the way.

LILLIAN. No, you'd better not. We might just happen to run into some one, and (*gives him a warning look*) we don't want to spoil things now by taking a silly risk.

JACK. That's right. But isn't it the limit!

MARY. Good night, Miss Miranda. I'll be over the first thing in the morning.

(*As* MARY *goes to* MIRANDA, JACK *puts his arms around* LILLIAN *and kisses her, unnoticed by* MIRANDA.)

MIRANDA. That's right, dearie. Good night, Lillian.

LILLIAN. Good night. (LILLIAN *and* MARY *go out through the center door.*)

MIRANDA (*with a touch of sadness*). Jack, I wish you'd take that wedding bell down. I don't believe I'll want to see it hanging there any longer.

JACK (*taking the bell down*). All right. You're a brave little lady, Miss Miranda. I don't believe any of us realize how brave. It's too bad Anna had to go away to live. (*After removing the bell, he closes the outside door.*)

MIRANDA. No, 'tain't. Young folks have the same

right to make their lives that their folks did before them. We got a right to advise if we think they're going to spoil their lives, but we ain't got the right to interfere.

JACK (*admiringly*). Gee, don't I wish you were my father! (*Turns toward the center door.*) Someone coming, Miss Miranda. (*Opens the door.*) Why, dad, is it you?

JOE PAYSON *enters, center door.*

JOE (*gruffly*). What are you doing here?

MIRANDA (*stepping forward quickly*). Good evening, Joe.

JOE (*shakes hands with* MIRANDA). Good evening, Miranda. (*Turns to* JACK.) I asked you a question.

JACK (*gathering up the bell and streamers*). I'm helping Miss Miranda, just at this present moment.

JOE (*angrily*). You were at the wedding?

JACK (*emphatically*). I was not.

JOE (*suspiciously*). I just saw Lillian Whitcomb coming from here. You been here with her?

JACK (*stiffly*). I object to this, father. It's bad enough when we're alone. We don't need to drag others in.

JOE (*sarcastically*). Is that so? Getting high and mighty, ain't you? Well, let me tell you, young man, I'll say just what I please to you, and just where I please to say it. Put that in y'r pipe and smoke it! You understand.

JACK (*takes a step forward, then stops and glances at* MIRANDA). Perfectly, sir. (*Turns to* MIRANDA.) I'll put this stuff in the kitchen. (*Exits right.*)

MIRANDA (*gently*). Joe, there ain't a mite o' need o' you getting all worked up over nothing. Lillian was here with Mary, and Jack came in. That's likely

to happen in any house in the village, and at most any time. You can't expect that Jack and Lillian ain't going to meet this whole vacation.

JOE. I'll see that Jack is so busy it won't happen often.

MIRANDA (*uncomfortably*). Did you come over here to see me about something, Joe?

JACK *enters, right, from the kitchen.*

JOE. Yes, I did.

MIRANDA (*calmly*). Won't you sit down?

JOE (*taking a chair at right of table*). Thanks, Mirandy.

JACK (*quietly*). Would you like to have me wait for you, father?

JOE (*gruffly*). Can if you like.

MIRANDA. Joe Payson, ain't you ashamed to talk to your boy that way? The Lord was good when He gave you a son like Jack. (*Sits back of table.*)

JOE. I haven't said He wasn't, have I?

MIRANDA. Well, you act as if you doubted it the most of the time.

JOE. Expect me to run around holding Jack's hand and calling him papa's boy?

MIRANDA. Joe Payson, how you talk.

JOE (*with a grudging laugh*). Sit down, Jack. I want to talk to Miranda for a few minutes and then we'll walk home together. I want your advice about some improvements I'm thinking about making on the house.

JACK (*sits on sofa by window*). All right, father.

JOE (*trying to be pleasant*). Suit you better, Mirandy?

MIRANDA. It sounds human, anyway.

JOE. Jack knows I mean all right. I've got his interests at heart, Mirandy.

MIRANDA. No question about that, Joe. But I say, and I always will say, if we got love in our hearts, it pays to show it.

JOE. Mirandy, what you planning on doing, now you're left alone?

MIRANDA (*slowly*). Why—I haven't got around to doing any planning, Joe.

JOE. I suppose you'll go and live with your brother, or something like that?

MIRANDA. No. I don't believe I want to leave the village. This is my home, and I love it.

JOE. I, for one, would hate to see you leaving. But in case you want to sell this house and farm, I'd like to buy it.

MIRANDA (*surprised*). You would?

JOE. Yes, that's what I come for; to get in ahead of anyone else.

MIRANDA (*smiling*). Do you expect all the neighbors will be trying to buy me out?

JOE. It might occur to someone else, same as it has to me.

MIRANDA. It hadn't occurred to me yet. And if it had, the first thing I should have thought was how hard it would be to sell.

JOE. No; that'll be the easy part.

MIRANDA. I must say I'm surprised. Now you've mentioned it, I'll think about it. But I don't believe I want to sell.

JOE. If you should decide that you do, I want you to promise that the first chance will be mine.

MIRANDA. Oh, I'll promise that. But Joe, what do you want to buy my place for?

JOE (*evasively*). I can't tell you just now, Mirandy.

It's like this. I—I'd want to keep some stranger from getting it, that's all.

MIRANDA. You can have the first bid. But I can't understand why anyone should want to buy my little farm. Ain't no gold or diamonds on it, is there, Joe? (*Laughs.*)

JOE (*embarrassed*). Well, no—I guess not.

MIRANDA. Yes, you can have the first bid. They ain't likely to be no other.

JOE. All right, Mirandy. I won't keep you up any longer. I just wanted to be the first to speak about it. We'll be going, Jack. (*Turns to the door.*)

(JACK *rises.*)

MIRANDA. How's Louisy?

JOE. She's pretty smart. Probably you'll get more time to come visiting now. We're always glad to see you. (*Opens door, then turns.*) Glad to have you close up here and come and stay with us a spell.

MIRANDA. Thanks, Joe. All the neighbors are so good to me. Good night.

JOE (*going out*). Good night.

JACK (*following* JOE). Good night, Miss Miranda.

(JOE *and* JACK *speak together, and exeunt, center.*)

MIRANDA (*stands looking after them for a second, closes the door, then comes down to the fireplace and speaks to the picture*). Now, that's what I call real kind of curious. Don't you, Hiram? What does Joe Payson want of our farm? (*Clock strikes ten; she turns and speaks to the canary.*) Land sakes, Dickie bird! I don't remember I ever kept you up as late as this before. (*Covers bird cage, closes window, turns out the lamp; lights half down. She goes to the mantel and blows out one candle; lights three-quarters down. She takes*

the other candle, and speaks again to the picture.) This is the first time since you left me, Hiram, that I've ever been all alone. I reckon it's time for a new chapter in my life. Well, we'll jest wait for the Lord to turn the page. (*Exits upstairs, carrying the candle.*)

(*Stage dark. Short pause.*)

JERRY MACCONNELL *cautiously pushes window further open from outside. There is a ray of moonlight from this window. He steps in, misses his footing on the sofa, slips and falls forward on to the floor. He groans, turns, sits up and holds his ankle.*

JERRY (*under his breath*). Merry Christmas!

MIRANDA *enters and comes half way down the stairs, holding the candle over her head. Lights one-quarter up.*

MIRANDA. What for the land sakes has happened?

JERRY (*quickly*). Don't shoot! Don't shoot! (*Holds his hands over his head.*) I got both hands up.

MIRANDA (*coming down the stairs*). Who is it?

JERRY. Only me.

MIRANDA (*coming forward*). I don't seem to know your voice.

JERRY. No, ma'am. We ain't acquainted.

MIRANDA. Are you hurt?

JERRY. I gave my ankle a twist.

MIRANDA (*standing by his side*). Look up here.

JERRY (*looking at her feet and slowly elevating his glance*). I wonder what'll I see when I reach the top. (*She is holding the candle above her head.*) Liberty, enlightening the world!

MIRANDA. How did you get in?

JERRY. Just dropped in.

MIRANDA (*puzzled*). Where?

JERRY. Through the window.

MIRANDA. Did you knock? I didn't hear you.

JERRY. No ma'am. I didn't knock. I hadn't any idea of disturbing anyone.

MIRANDA (*leaning toward him*). Whose boy are you? I don't remember that I ever seen you before.

JERRY. You never did.

MIRANDA. Where did you come from?

JERRY. I walked over today from Barretstown.

MIRANDA. From Barretstown? Why, you poor boy! You must be tired to death. Here—give me your hand.

JERRY (*rising slowly*). I can manage myself. I don't believe it's very bad. It kind of took the starch out of me at first. (*Leans on the table.*)

MIRANDA (*pushes arm chair toward table*). You set right here and let me see how bad you're hurt.

JERRY. No ma'am. I'll go right along, if you ain't going to rouse the rest of the house.

(MIRANDA *laughs and lights the lamp. Stage lights up full.*)

MIRANDA. There ain't no one to rouse. I'm all alone tonight. Besides, we don't need no help. I can take care of you, even if you've broken your ankle. Where were you going?

JERRY. I'm on my way to Terryville. I'm going over to the factory to get work.

MIRANDA. Oh, yes. And did you think someone you knew lived here?

JERRY. No ma'am (*turns away*). Let me go. I'm so darned ashamed of myself I can't face you any longer.

MIRANDA. Why, how you talk! I don't mind if you did come in my house by mistake.

JERRY. I didn't come by mistake. I intended to come. I'm down on my luck. And when I saw your

window open, I came in to—to—steal something to eat—and a little money, if I could find any—enough to take me over to Terryville. I ain't a burglar. I'm too amateur for that. But I'm the next thing to it. I'm a tramp.

MIRANDA. Great land o' Goshen! (*Puts her hand on his shoulder and swings him toward her and looks at him.*) Tramp? You ain't nothing of the kind. I've seen tramps, and you don't fill the bill at all. Why, you poor boy! You poor boy! Here! Sit down in this chair this minute.

JERRY (*wonderingly*). Sit down?

MIRANDA. Yes, sit down. You're going to have something to eat and a bed to sleep in.

JERRY (*choking over his words*). No—no—I couldn't.

MIRANDA. Do you know anyone in this village?

JERRY (*beginning to grow weak, sways a little and leans on the table*). No, ma'am.

MIRANDA. Do you suppose I'm going to let you travel on—supperless, bedless and with a twisted ankle into the bargain?

JERRY. You ain't afraid?

MIRANDA. Afraid? Of what?

JERRY. Of me.

MIRANDA. You! Well, you do say the beatenest things I ever listened to! Why, you have admitted you were a tramp, and that you came in here to steal. I could have the law on to you and have you took up, but I've captured you. You're my prisoner, and you're going to do as I say. If you go one step out that door, I'll call up the constable and put him on your track, and you ain't in no condition to get far tonight. (*Firmly.*) Now, you sit down! Do you understand me, young man?

JERRY (*with a gasp*). Yes, ma'am.

MIRANDA. When did you have anything to eat?

JERRY (*faintly*). Last night. No, I think I had a piece of bread this morning.

MIRANDA. Mercy sakes! (*Brings some dishes from cupboard and puts them on table.*) Did anyone ever hear the like? (*Exits right into kitchen.*)

(JERRY *draws his hand wearily across his eyes, leans forward on the table, and his head falls on his arms.*)

MIRANDA *re-enters with bread, milk and cold meat, which she places on the table.*

MIRANDA (*sympathetically*). There, you poor child! You're jest wore out.

JERRY (*sitting up*). Don't talk to me like that. Be harsh, but for heaven's sake don't be so kind.

MIRANDA. The world's been harsh enough, but we won't talk. You eat.

(JERRY *begins to eat.* MIRANDA *exits right and re-enters after a moment with a basin, towel and bandage.*)

MIRANDA. Let me see your ankle.

JERRY. No, no! I can't let you do that. Please.

MIRANDA. Very well. I'll put the things in your room and you can do it for yourself. (*Exits up stairs.*)

JERRY *eats hungrily.* MIRANDA *re-enters after a moment.*

MIRANDA. You know you ain't told me your name yet? (*Sits opposite him at the table.*)

JERRY (*between mouthfuls*). Jerry MacConnell.

MIRANDA. I am Miranda Peasley. How old are you?

JERRY. Seventeen.

MIRANDA (*gently*). Just about what I thought.

Nothing but a boy. You ought not to be out in the world looking for work. You ought to be at home where your mother can watch you—make you drink milk, keep your feet dry, go to bed early, and spank you if you don't behave yourself.

JERRY (*smiling faintly*). I guess maybe you're right.

MIRANDA. If I find you're running away from home, I'll have the constable ship you back in a hurry.

JERRY. The only home I ever knew was an institution called the St. Agnes Orphanage.

MIRANDA. Orphanage? You mean you haven't any folks?

JERRY. If I have, no one knows who they are or where they are. But I think I can just remember two loving blue eyes, and a warm cheek pressed close to mine. I can still taste the salt of tears (*pause*). That must have been my mother.

MIRANDA (*wiping her eyes*). Oh, my poor boy.

JERRY (*ashamed, wiping his eyes*). I guess the pain has made a baby of me.

MIRANDA. Men never can stand pain like women. Let me look at it. (*Stoops to his ankle.*)

JERRY (*bluffing*). No, no; the pain is leaving. It's not so bad. Gee! I wonder what it would be like to be your boy.

MIRANDA. Suppose we try it and see.

JERRY (*astonished*). Ma'am?

MIRANDA. Are you sure you're going to get work over to Terryville?

JERRY. No ma'am, I was just going to find out. If they didn't have anything I was going on further.

MIRANDA. Well, now, I got a place for you right here. Suppose you try it for awhile and see how we get along.

JERRY. What doing? Eating and sleeping? You must have a lot of help on your farm.

MIRANDA. Yes, o' course. I got men to run my farm. But I have to hire a neighbor's boy to do all kinds of chores, and the men are always hiring extra help, and I need some one right in the house with me. The last of my family was married and went away to-night, and I got to have someone with me.

JERRY. And you'd take me?

MIRANDA. Why not? You look to me as if it'd do you a whole lot o' good to live on a farm awhile.

JERRY (*incredulously*). But you don't know anything about me.

MIRANDA (*calmly*). You're a motherless boy in need of a home and some care. I don't need to know anything more.

JERRY. Yes, you do. I came in here to steal—

MIRANDA (*interrupting*). It's the first time you ever did a thing like that.

JERRY (*surprised*). Why, how do you know?

MIRANDA. You ain't got the kind o' eyes that lies and steals. That was the first time, and—(*decidedly*) it's going to be the last.

JERRY (*soberly*). You bet it is! You're right there. But, Mrs. Peasley, I've run away from the city because I'm in trouble. The police were after me.

MIRANDA (*laughing*). Well, I say you need a mother to spank you once in awhile.

JERRY. You don't understand, Mrs. Peasley. This is serious.

MIRANDA. You mean you think it is, and you're trying to make me think so, too. It's too bad to do so much bad thinking. Now, suppose the police had got you, what would they have done with you?

JERRY. Taken me to the juvenile court, had a trial,

and probably sentenced me to a reformatory. I might have been sent on to some farm to work if anybody had interceded for me. Sometimes a man offers to be a big brother to the prisoner.

MIRANDA. I want to know! That's one o' the most human things I ever heard about city folks. Well now, Jerry, why don't you sentence yourself to this farm?

JERRY (*pleased*). Some sentence, that would be.

MIRANDA. It might not be as easy as you think. There's some things you'll have to do if you stay with me.

JERRY. Well, I'll do them, no matter what. If I stay here, what you say goes.

MIRANDA. What are you putting an "if" in for?

JERRY. Because it isn't fair to you. If an officer traced me down here, they could get you in trouble for shielding me.

MIRANDA. I want to know! Why, Jerry, I don't even know what you done.

JERRY. But I'm going to tell you—right now.

MIRANDA. No, no. They ain't no need.

JERRY. You must know the truth, or I can't stay. You must judge me.

MIRANDA. Well?

JERRY. I was working in a newspaper office in Boston. I had been there six months when, one day, I was sent to collect a bill of fifty dollars for an advertisement. I got the money and gave a receipt. When I got to the office I turned the money over to the cashier, but he denied he ever got it. I had no proof of my innocence. It was my word against the cashier's, and as he was a trusted employee, of course his word was taken. I was panic-stricken with fear—and ran away. That's the truth.

MIRANDA. I believe you, my boy. (*Rises, with a*

peculiar light in her eyes.) We won't talk any more tonight. I want you to have some rest. Come, can you walk?

JERRY (*rises*). Yes, ma'am. It isn't very bad. Do you really want me to stay?

MIRANDA. Of course I do. You go right upstairs, the first door on your right. (*Lights candle on mantel and hands it to him.*)

JERRY (*limps toward the stairs, turns and looks back at her*). I ought to try to say something, but I can't. (*Smiles faintly.*) "There ain't no words—"

MIRANDA. This is no time for talk. You bathe your ankle and rub some oil on it, and bandage it. Are you listening to what I'm saying?

JERRY. Yes, ma'am.

MIRANDA (*commandingly*). Well, see that you do it.

JERRY (*enthusiastically*). Yes, ma'am. What you say goes.

MIRANDA. That's the way to talk. Good night, and God bless you, lad.

JERRY (*starts upstairs and turns*). I didn't know there was anyone on earth like you. (*Exits upstairs.*)

MIRANDA (*stands for a moment looking after him. Blows out the lamp. Lights three-fourths down. Takes her candle, goes to the mantel and speaks to the picture*). Well, Hiram, the Lord hasn't been long answering. I wasn't expecting a son quite so soon, or that he was coming full grown, or was going to be jes' like that, but—land sakes! Folks don't always get their children as they picture them. They have to accept them the way the Lord sends them.

CURTAIN.

MOTHER MINE

The Second Act.

The scene is the same. It is three weeks later, in the forenoon. On the center table is a pan of dishes. The outside door is open, and remains so throughout the act.

All stage lights up full. Yellow bunches shining in door and window in flat.

The rise of the curtain reveals Miranda *at the center table, washing dishes, and* Mary *drying them and putting them in the cupboard. This business continues for just a brief moment before the dialogue begins.*

Miranda. Land's sakes, Mary! How fast you work. There ain't another girl in the village who can work with you. You been jest like a daughter to me these last three weeks.

Mary (*with a sigh*). I'm glad I'm good for something.

Miranda. Well, what in the name o' common sense do you mean by that?

Mary. Oh, Miss Miranda, I suppose I'm terrible, but every time Lillian comes home I just hate myself. No wonder Jack is crazy about her.

Miranda (*dismayed*). Mary Tisdale! You ain't never in this world jealous of Lillian?

Mary. I'm afraid I am, just a little. Isn't it dreadful?

Miranda (*emphatically*). I should say it was. Well, you got to get right over it. That's all they is to that. Suppose Jack should find it out. How'd you feel?

MARY (*puzzled*). Jack? (*With a sudden laugh.*) Oh, Miss Miranda—it isn't Jack! I don't want Jack.

MIRANDA. Well, I'm relieved. But what is it you do want?

MARY. I want to go away to school, too. I want to go to the city. Oh, I've so many ambitions. I want to ride on the elevated, and go to the theatre, and learn the newest dances, and have a silk petticoat that rustles.

MIRANDA. I want to know! Anything else?

MARY (*impulsively*). Yes. Don't breathe it outside this room. I want a beau.

MIRANDA. Well, a girl with a face like yours ought not to want for that very long.

MARY (*ruefully*). But what about a girl with a pa like mine?

MIRANDA. He'll have to come to it after awhile. He can't keep you forever. And if you get the right kind of a beau, probably after awhile he'll take you up to the city and let you realize some of your ambitions.

MARY. Yes, the right kind of a beau.

MIRANDA. There's Leander Perkins thinks the sun most rose and set in you.

MARY (*with a shudder*). Don't, please! Leander Perkins!

MIRANDA. He's a real good boy, Mary, if there ever was one.

MARY. Good? Yes, he's good, but that's all you can say for him. And there isn't anything very exciting about a goody-goody.

MIRANDA (*pretending she is shocked*). Well, Mary Tisdale, I'm beat.

MARY. Oh, Miss Miranda, I say things to you I wouldn't d a r e to say to anyone else on earth.

MIRANDA. I should hope you wouldn't. They ain't the kind of things you want published in the *Banner*.

(*With a sudden thought.*) There! I got to see my gingerbread. (*Starts for kitchen*). Don't you work here no longer than you feel like. You've done a lot.

MARY. I love to work here. I love your house (*throws her arms around* MIRANDA), and, oh, how I love you!

MIRANDA. Bless your heart. I hope you get the right kind of a beau. (*Exits, right, into kitchen.*)

MARY *continues working.* JERRY *enters, center, from outside.*

JERRY (*calls*). Mrs. Peasley! (*Stops abruptly and removes his cap.*) I beg your pardon.

MARY. Oh! (*Suddenly smiling.*) Good morning, Jerry. (*Drops her dish wiper.*)

JERRY (*looking his admiration*). Good morning. (*Picks up wiper and hands it to her.*)

MARY. Thank you.

JERRY. Working awful hard?

MARY. Not very. How do you like our village?

JERRY. Better every minute.

MARY (*shyly*). Isn't that nice. Where is your own home?

JERRY (*without thinking*). Boston. (*Regrets his reply.*)

MARY (*surprised*). Really? Why, I thought Miss Miranda said some place not far from us.

JERRY. Barretstown, maybe.

MARY. Yes, that was it.

JERRY. I did come from there. I used to live in Boston some time ago.

MARY. Oh, wouldn't I love to see Boston!

JERRY. Would you?

MARY. Maybe you can tell me some of the things I want to know.

JERRY. Go to it. I'll deliver the goods if I can.

MARY. Is—is it fun to ride on the elevated?

JERRY. Fun? That doesn't express it. You ought to try it some morning about eight-thirty.

MARY. Can you do the newest dances?

JERRY. Can I? Well, rather!

MARY (*eagerly*). Oh, will you teach me how?

JERRY. Will I? Oh, boy! Lead me to it. (*Starts toward her.*) First you—

MARY (*alarmed, looking toward the door*). Oh, not now; not now! In the barn sometime, when nobody knows.

JERRY. Sure, if I stay here.

MARY. If you stay? Aren't you going to? I thought you had come to work for Miss Miranda.

JERRY. Sure, I have. But I don't know how long she'll want me. (*Takes the wiper from her hand.*) Go ahead. You wash. I'll wipe.

MARY. And—oh, tell me about the theatres! Do you go very much?

JERRY. Every time I could get a pass.

MARY. A pass?

JERRY. Yes. I—I—knew a fellow that worked on a newspaper, and sometimes he gave me a pass that would take me in to the theatre without paying. See? I've never piled up enough jack yet to spend much on amusing myself.

MARY (*trying to understand him*). I guess maybe I don't know what you're talking about. But—but when you did go to the theatre, wasn't it wonderful?

JERRY (*indifferently*). Oh, I don't know. There's some things I like better.

MARY. Goodness. I'd like to know what they could be.

JERRY. Would you? Well, wiping these cups with you beats any show I've ever been to.

MARY (*doubtfully*). I don't—I don't know just how you mean that.

JERRY. I mean it all right, little girl. You can bet your last dollar on that.

MARY (*with a sigh*). I don't suppose you are interested in silk petticoats.

JERRY (*with a chuckle*). Well, I haven't been yet, but a fellow never knows what he's coming to.

MARY (*looks a little hurt*). Did I say something funny?

JERRY. Not on your life. I was laughing at my own thoughts. I beg your pardon, Mary—er—I mean—

MARY. That's right; Mary.

JERRY. You don't want me to call you that, do you? Right off the bat?

MARY. I don't know what it is to be right off the bat, but why wouldn't you call me Mary? Don't you want me to call you Jerry?

JERRY. Do I want to go to heaven on an ice wagon? You bet I want you to call me Jerry. And you bet your sweet life I'll be right there when you call.

MARY (*puzzled*). Why, we are strangers, you know.

JERRY. I don't know whether I do or not, but believe me, I'm going to find out. (*Telephone rings.*) Shall I answer?

MARY. No, I will. I don't believe people around here are likely to know what you're talking about. (*Goes to phone.*) Hello?...Yes...Oh, all right. I'll come. (*Hangs up receiver and turns to* JERRY.) Will you please tell Miss Miranda I have gone home for a few minutes, but I'll come back? (*Goes up center.*)

JERRY. All right. Don't forget.

MARY (*looking back from door*). Forget what?

JERRY. To come back.

MARY (*with a shy little smile*). Jerry. I—I hope you'll stay. (*Exits, center door.*)

JERRY (*softly, as he looks out of the window*). Gee, kid, I wish I could! (*Begins to whistle as he finishes the dishes.*)

MIRANDA *enters from the kitchen.*

MIRANDA. Well, did I ever! You're handy as a girl. Where's Mary?

JERRY. She had to go home, but she's coming back. What shall I do next, mother mine?

MIRANDA. Set down and talk to me. I'm feelin' downright depressed, an' that's the truth. (*Sits right of center table.*)

JERRY (*sits in chair back of table*). Why?

MIRANDA. Suppose you was to be took away from me now. You've been here three weeks, and it seems you've always belonged right here.

JERRY. So it does. And I'll tell the world, I a m yours for life.

MIRANDA. It's all very well to joke about it, but it ain't going to be no joke for me. What do you suppose I'm going to do without you?

JERRY. I'm staying right here just as long as you say the word.

MIRANDA. Yes, I realize that. But I ain't got no right to say the word.

JERRY. You have a right to me just as long as you want me.

MIRANDA (*wistfully*). That would be for life, Jerry.

JERRY (*slowly*). I know you don't want me on the farm for life, but I don't dare to hope you can mean that—that—you want—me?

MIRANDA. That's jest what I do mean. The Lord sent you here jest when I was praying for a son, and I don't know how I'm going to let you go. I'd like to keep you always for my own boy. But that can't be.

JERRY. Why can't it, Miss Miranda? I can't believe my own ears when you say you want me. But if it's really so, you'll never get the chance to cast me off.

MIRANDA. I wouldn't be selfish enough to keep you back here in the country. You've got to be hunting around for another newspaper where you can get started again.

JERRY. Would you leave the country for any part of the year?

MIRANDA (*wonderingly*). Leave the country? Why, I ain't never thought of such a thing.

JERRY. I've had a vision. I didn't dare to mention it, because I couldn't believe you felt the same way I did. I've been wondering how I was ever going to get along without you.

MIRANDA (*delighted*). Have you? I want to know!

JERRY. Of course I want to go to some city and try to get another job. And I just thought it would be the most wonderful thing in the world if you would come, too.

MIRANDA. For the land sakes!

JERRY (*eagerly*). After I got a job, you know, we could live in a little apartment. You don't know, of course, but they have the dandiest little ones—three rooms and a kitchenette. Gee, wouldn't we have a love nest!

MIRANDA. My soul! Did I ever! Me in the city!

JERRY. Why not?

MIRANDA (*getting excited*). No reason. No reason in the world! I could come home in the summer. (*Looking around the room.*) I'd take Dickie (*glances toward*

the portrait), and Hiram—and my land, wouldn't it be a change?

JERRY (*with a shout*). You've said something. It would be a change!

MIRANDA. You better go right off and see what you can get.

JERRY (*leaning over and patting her shoulder*). Gee, but you're the best little sport that ever lived!

MIRANDA. Where you going? Of course you wouldn't dare to go to Boston? Not yet?

JERRY (*shakes his head*). No. There are plenty of good sized cities in Massachusetts, and I could get experience on a smaller paper until it was safe to go to Boston, or later to some other large city. I'm not sure just where I'd better start out. I can't afford to travel around too much.

MIRANDA. Yes, you can. Yes, you can. Perhaps you can travel all you need to. You're my son from this very minute. I've known you was from the minute you fell in my window.

JERRY (*rises and goes to her side*). You're the most wonderful little woman in all the world. I wonder why this has happened to me. I know one thing. I don't deserve it. But I'm going to forget everything that has happened in the past, and try with all my heart to be worthy of you. (*Suddenly takes her hand, kisses it and turns away.*)

MIRANDA (*feeling for her handkerchief*). Jerry—Jerry MacConnell—you get me all worked up! For the land sakes! (*Looks out the window.*) Oh, Jerry, there's the postman, and my flag is up. I got a letter.

(*She exits, right, to kitchen.* JERRY *exits, center, and re-enters with a letter.* MIRANDA *re-enters from kitchen with a glass of milk and some gingerbread*).

MIRANDA. There. You get busy with that.

JERRY. Oh, gee! (*Sits at table and eats.*)

MIRANDA (*absently, as she takes up the letter*). You're altogether too thin and white. (*Examines the letter.*) Boston. Well, who's writing from Boston, I'd like to know? Boston. Now, I wonder. I can't think of a soul that would write from Boston. Well, I declare. Who do you suppose it's from?

JERRY. You can search me.

MIRANDA (*astonished*). I can what?

JERRY. That means I couldn't guess in a thousand years.

MIRANDA. Neither could I. Well, I won't try any longer. I'll open it and find out. (*Opens letter and reads.*) Well, did I ever? If this isn't the beatenest thing I ever heard tell of. A man in Boston I never heard of wants to buy this farm. And that night you came one of my neighbors wanted to buy it. What do you think of that?

JERRY. Don't they give a reason for wanting it?

MIRANDA (*looking at the letter*). This man just says he wants a country place, and—

JERRY (*suddenly*). My God!

MIRANDA (*shocked*). Jerry MacConnell!

JERRY. Don't you— have you—do you—

MIRANDA (*sternly*). Jerry MacConnell, do you know what you said?

JERRY (*vaguely*). I—what I said? No, ma'am— yes, ma'am. I said, my—

MIRANDA (*interrupting sharply*). Don't you dare to say it again! Ain't you ashamed of yourself?

JERRY (*coming to*). I'm afraid I ain't, but I guess by the way you look I ought to be. I'm sorry.

MIRANDA. Don't you ever let me hear you talk like that again!

JERRY. I'll try not to, but I'm likely to forget. I'm used to saying things like that.

MIRANDA. Well, you'll get un-used to it, right straight off. When you feel like saying anything like that again, you say, "Mercy sakes." Are you paying attention to what I'm saying?

JERRY (*trying not to laugh*). You bet. When I feel stirred over any little thing I'm to say—"Mercy sakes!"

MIRANDA (*warningly*). See that you remember.

JERRY. Remember? I couldn't forget that in a lifetime.

MIRANDA. Now, what did you get excited about?

JERRY. I just happened to think of something I heard. This is Tapley Village.

MIRANDA. Of course it is.

JERRY (*seriously*). Mother mine, don't answer that letter now. Wait. Don't sell your farm until—

MIRANDA (*interrupting impatiently*). Until nothing. I ain't no idea of selling it—(*thoughtfully*) unless—

JERRY. If you only knew what this little home looks like to me. Gee; it's as near heaven, and you're as near an angel, as I ever want to get.

MIRANDA. Now, ain't it terrible for a boy to be able to say a thing like that. Well, we'll see. You're going to stay right here for the present.

LILLIAN *enters, center.* JERRY *rises quickly.*

LILLIAN. Good morning, Miss Miranda. (*Sees* JERRY.) Oh, I thought you were—(*hesitates.*)

MIRANDA. Come right in, dear. You know Jerry MacConnell that's working for me. (JERRY *bows and* LILLIAN *nods.*) Jerry, I wish you'd go to the store next. There's a basket and a list on the kitchen table.

JERRY. Yes, ma'am. (*Starts for the kitchen.*)

MIRANDA. And you tell Joe Payson I'm getting tired of waiting for that chicken wire he ordered for me.

(JERRY *exits, right.*)

LILLIAN. I've heard a lot about Jerry, your new helper. Lettie told me you treat him like a son.

MIRANDA. I'll bet she did. (*Laughing.*)

LILLIAN. She's hurrying to beat the band to get her work done and her clothes changed so she can get over here. She's still full of curiosity.

MIRANDA (*disgusted*). Now ain't that sense? What's she care about that boy?

LILLIAN. Where did he come from, Miss Miranda?

MIRANDA. Barretstown.

LILLIAN. Don't you believe it.

MIRANDA (*sharply*). What do you mean?

LILLIAN. He hasn't the kind of manners that go with Barretstown.

MIRANDA. What do you know about his manners?

LILLIAN. The way he acted when I came in. He might not have moved if he'd had time to think, but he instinctively got to his feet. And bowed like—well, not like Barretstown. Oh, I've had my eye on him for the last three weeks.

MIRANDA (*sniffing*). You're terrible observing, I must say.

LILLIAN. How did he happen to come to you?

MIRANDA (*impatiently*). Now see here, Lillian. Don't be silly about that poor boy. He just happened to do them things. For goodness sakes don't stir up any foolishness in the village about my boy.

LILLIAN (*surprised*). Why, I don't intend to. But as Jack would say, I don't want to see anyone put anything over on you.

MIRANDA. Land sakes! I guess I'm about old enough to look out for myself.

LILLIAN (*taking an envelope from her pocket*). I'll leave this—

MIRANDA (*quickly*). Don't leave anything. (*Glances towards the window.*) Here's your father coming in. (LILLIAN *hastily puts the envelope back in her pocket.* MIRANDA *goes to the door and opens it.*) Good morning, deacon.

WHITCOMB *enters, center.*

WHITCOMB (*coming in*). Good morning, Mirandy. (*Removes his hat.*)

LILLIAN. Are you ready so soon?

WHITCOMB. Yes. The parson wasn't home.

LILLIAN. Father and I are going to town, Miss Miranda. Can we do anything for you?

MIRANDA. I don't think so. I had so much finery for the wedding I sha'n't need anything for a spell. But, deacon, I'd like to ask a little advice.

WHITCOMB. Certain, Mirandy; certain.

MIRANDA (*hands him the letter*). Read this.

WHITCOMB (*reads the letter*). Who is this man?

MIRANDA. I ain't the least idea.

WHITCOMB. Stranger to you, and wants to buy your farm? How'd he hear about it? He offers a big price.

MIRANDA. He does. The land only knows how he heard. And there's something else. Now promise you won't get violent.

WHITCOMB. Violent? Who? Me? Why should I?

MIRANDA. Joe Payson was here before, and he wants to buy the farm.

WHITCOMB (*at the top of his voice*). Joe Payson?

MIRANDA. Now, deacon.

LILLIAN. Father.

(*These two lines are spoken together.*)

WHITCOMB (*calming down a little*). Mirandy, you can rest sure there's a nigger in the woodpile. You can't trust a Payson, even as far as you can see them going.

(LILLIAN *turns away, walks to the window and stands looking out.*)

MIRANDA. Well, I don't think that, deacon. They're good neighbors, and Joe has always used me well. I ain't aiming to stir up any trouble. But this looks queer.

WHITCOMB. You let me keep this letter, Mirandy. I'll take it to town and get my lawyer to send up to Boston and find out who this is.

MIRANDA. Can you do it quietly, deacon?

WHITCOMB. Yes. We won't say nothing until we find out what's up. (*To* LILLIAN.) You see what underhand messes the Paysons mix into.

MIRANDA. Now, deacon, you don't know nothing about this yet.

WHITCOMB (*curtly*). Know as well as I want to. Can't tell me.

MIRANDA. You won't tell anybody?

WHITCOMB. No. You can trust me, Mirandy. All ready, Lillian? (*Exits, center.*)

MIRANDA (*puts her arm around* LILLIAN). Good-bye, dearie.

LILLIAN (*gratefully*). Good-bye, Miss Miranda. (*Exits, center, after her father.*)

MIRANDA *goes to the table. After a slight pause* JERRY *enters, center.*

JERRY (*as he enters*). Mrs. Peasley.

MIRANDA (*turning with a start*). Land sakes, how you startled me! What's the matter?

JERRY (*quietly*). There's an officer in the village. He's after me. He all but saw me in the store. I started to go in the side door just as he came in the front. I listened for a minute and then I sneaked back of the store and came across lots.

MIRANDA (*hopefully*). Maybe he'll go right along. What's he in? An auto?

JERRY. Yes, ma'am, and he'll be up here mighty quick. He stopped for some crackers and milk or he would have beaten me to it. My ankle won't let me travel at my usual clip.

MIRANDA. What makes you think he'll be up here?

JERRY. The storekeeper told him about you having a new boy working for you and no one knew where he came from.

MIRANDA (*disgusted*). Now wouldn't that make a cat sick! It's a pity people can't mind their own business.

JERRY. I suppose I might as well let him take me.

MIRANDA (*sharply*). Well, I suppose you hadn't. You've spent the most of your life in one institution. It ain't going to do you no good to spend some more of it in a different kind.

JERRY (*wonderingly*). Gee, how you understand! That's just why I worked so hard to get away.

MIRANDA. Well, I've beat the law this time. You're my prisoner and you do just what I say. You go in there. (*Points left.*) Open the door at the left and go upstairs. There's an unfinished room right up there. (*Points up over the mantel.*) You go in and stay till I call you. (*Auto horn is heard.*)

JERRY. Here he comes.

MIRANDA. Hurry up! And for goodness sake, don't move around up there. (JERRY *exits, left.* MIRANDA *grabs the dish wiper and a cup.* LEWIS *knocks at the*

center door. MIRANDA *goes to the door with cup and wiper in her hands.*)

LEWIS *enters, center.*

LEWIS. Good morning.

MIRANDA. Good morning. Won't you come in?

LEWIS (*stepping in, glances sharply about*). Thanks. My name is Lewis. I've come from Boston.

MIRANDA. I want to know. Won't you sit down?

LEWIS. Well, I don't know. I'm in somewhat of a hurry.

MIRANDA. I hope you haven't come about the farm, because I haven't no idea of selling, and—

LEWIS (*breaking in*). I'm chasing up a youngster that got into trouble, and I heard you have a boy working for you who is a stranger in the village.

MIRANDA. Yes, I have.

LEWIS. Where did he come from?

MIRANDA. Why, he said Barretstown.

LEWIS. And when did you hire him?

MIRANDA. Three weeks ago.

LEWIS. Aha! I bet we've caught our bird.

MIRANDA (*pretends to be alarmed*). Mercy sakes! You don't mean to say I've taken in a boy who has done something?

LEWIS (*interrupting*). Don't be frightened, madam. I'll soon take him off your hands if he proves to be the one I want.

MIRANDA. I should hope so. Land! I'd have a conniption to have anyone like that around.

LEWIS. Let me have a look at him and we'll soon know. Where is he?

MIRANDA. Why, I've sent him on an errand. Now ain't that too bad.

LEWIS. Well, I can wait awhile, I suppose.

MIRANDA. Yes, do. Let me show you the album. (*Gets the family album and opens it for* LEWIS.) That was my husband the spring I first met him. My land, I'll never forget that day. That is when we were married. I wish you could have seen my dress. It was blue—

LEWIS (*making a desperate effort to escape*). Pardon me, madam. I just happened to think I'm wasting time, and I can't afford to do that. Which way did the boy go?

MIRANDA. Well, now, I can't tell you that. I sent him on two errands. One down that way and one up that way. (*Points left and right.*)

LEWIS. How long will he be?

MIRANDA. Well, now, that depends. He might be an hour or so, and then he mightn't. Of course, he's kind of slow.

LEWIS. Slow?

MIRANDA. Yes, being lame.

LEWIS. Lame? The boy I want isn't lame. He's like a flash of lightning. What's he call himself?

MIRANDA. Jerry—er—Jerry—

LEWIS. Huckins?

MIRANDA. No, that weren't it. Mac something. MacConnell. That's it.

LEWIS. Well, of course you can't tell by the name. He wouldn't give the right one, and then there are plenty of Jerries in the world. What's he look like? Not very tall—slight—black hair?

MIRANDA. Yes. He's kinda short and slight, but this Jerry of mine has got the reddest head you ever looked at.

LEWIS. That settles it. I'll go right along. No need of wasting time. Thank you very much, madam; sorry to have troubled you.

MIRANDA. No trouble. I wish you could have stayed a spell. I'd like to have shown you the rest o' them pictures. There's one of Hiram in his G. A. R. uniform, and—

LEWIS (*hastily*). Some other time I might be passing this way. By the way, madam, you live right here on the main road; you might see our Jerry yet. He's down this way somewheres. If you do, will you please notify Mr. Crockett? (*Hands her a card.*)

MIRANDA (*reading card*). Mr. Crockett. Boston *Daily World.*

LEWIS. Crockett is the City Editor, and he's moving heaven and earth to find Jerry Huckins. It really is vitally important that he should be found.

MIRANDA. All right. If I see anyone I think ought to be took up, I'll—tell the world.

LEWIS (*laughs*). That's the idea. Thank you. Good day. (*Exits, center.*)

MIRANDA (*from door*). Good-bye! I'm real pleased to have seen you. (*Pause. She goes to window. Auto horn is heard.*)

JACK *steps in center.*

JACK. Miss Miranda. (*He turns and looks cautiously.*)

MIRANDA. Why, Jerry—how—

JACK (*turning, surprised*). Jerry?

MIRANDA. Jack Payson. Is it you? Back of you looks for all the world like Jerry, red cap and all.

JACK. Where's Jerry?

MIRANDA. He's gone on an errand.

JACK. I thought he had come back.

MIRANDA (*puzzled*). You thought— (*Stops abruptly; speaks sharply.*) Why should you think anything about him, anyway?

JACK (*hastily*). No reason at all. I wasn't thinking about what I was saying. Has Lillian been here?

MIRANDA. Yes, but her father came in and she didn't have no chance to leave anything even if she'd written it. And I don't know whether she had or not.

JACK. Then I'll have to come back later. Here's what I've written. (*Puts envelope on table.*)

MIRANDA. You going right home?

JACK. Yes.

MIRANDA. I got a recipe for putting up rhubarb that your mother wants. You wait a minute. I'll get it.

JACK. All right.

(MIRANDA *exits, right.*)

JACK (*walks over to canary*). Hello, Dickie!

LILLIAN *enters, center.*

LILLIAN. Jack! You here? And how you look!

JACK. Yes, some picture. This is father's idea of what goes well with my style and complexion. Honest to goodness, Lillian, he's given me enough work to last into the winter.

LILLIAN. He doesn't intend you shall have many idle moments.

JACK. You've said something. Say—I did it.

LILLIAN. No! Got your liberty bonds out of the safe?

JACK. Yep. Had the slickest chance. Climbed in the back window of the store and out again, just as easy. There's only one thing that's bothering me. Miss Miranda's new helper, Jerry.

LILLIAN. Why?

JACK. He was outside the store, and he saw me.

LILLIAN. Oh, Jack!

JACK. He's a good-natured looking chap. I came over here to tip him off, but he isn't here.

JERRY *appears in left door.*

JERRY (*quietly*). Yes, I am.

JACK (*crosses to him quickly*). Say, Jerry, you saw me come out of dad's store window. I was helping myself to something that belonged to me. There may be a row about it soon. If there is, please keep quiet about it, see? Lillian and I are going to get married, and we don't want anything to queer it. Our fathers object, you know. Please stand by me, old chap. You may be in love yourself some day.

JERRY. Sure thing. (*Smiles.*) I won't tell.

LILLIAN (*earnestly*). Can we depend upon you?

JERRY. You bet you can.

LILLIAN. You promise? (*Holds out her hand.*)

JERRY (*taking her hand*). Sure.

LILLIAN. Thank you, awfully. We'll do the same for you some day. (*Laughs.*)

JERRY (*going left*). You can depend on me, all right. (*Exits, left.*)

LILLIAN. Oh, Jack—if he should tell anyone!

JACK. He won't, I'm sure. And if he did—well, I could fight it out. But you, dear—(*Goes to her and puts his arms around her.*)

MIRANDA *enters, right.* LILLIAN *and* JACK *separate.*

MIRANDA (*displeased*). Now, see here. It was understood that you two wasn't to come at the same time.

LILLIAN. Well, we haven't.

JACK. We aren't—

LILLIAN. This is an accident.

MIRANDA (*to* LILLIAN). I thought you had gone to town with your father.

LILLIAN. Not yet. Father got detained. (*Takes envelope from the table.*) Jack, is this what you wrote?

JACK. Yes; give me yours.

LILLIAN (*hands it to him and goes to* MIRANDA). Please don't be cross. That's a dear! (*Runs out, center and left.*)

MIRANDA (*hands* JACK *a slip of paper*). Now you take this, and travel the opposite direction.

JACK (*laughs*). Yes'm. (*Exits, center and right.*)

MIRANDA (*looks out window, out door, then steps to fireplace, looks up and speaks cautiously*). Jerry! Come down!

After a slight pause, JERRY *enters left.*

MIRANDA. Did you hear?

JERRY. Every word that's been spoken since I went up there. Little mother, you're a wonder!

MIRANDA. It was real kinda hard to tell the truth all the time, but I managed. Thank the Lord you had on that red cap. I guess that's all that saved us. They seem pretty anxious to get you.

JERRY. I'll give myself up if you say the word.

MIRANDA. No, no; I couldn't bear that, Jerry.

JERRY. Yes, little mother.

MIRANDA. Did you like to work for a newspaper?

JERRY (*emphatically*). Yes, ma'am; you bet I did.

MIRANDA. I guess that accounts.

JERRY. Accounts?

MIRANDA. For some of the things you say, and your manners.

JERRY. Manners? I guess my manners aren't anything to brag about. There's a few things I've had to learn or Crockett would have knocked my head off. But taken in all it's a rough life. I was selling papers at eight, and I've worked in or around the office ever since.

Gee, I love it. I had just got my first real chance. And how I wanted to make good!

MIRANDA (*cheerfully*). Well, there's other newspapers in the world besides *The World.*

JERRY. You bet.

MIRANDA. You'll have to keep quiet until this trouble blows over and they forget about you.

JERRY. And while I'm keeping quiet, what you say goes.

MIRANDA. Well, I say first of all that you're going to get some health and some joy out of life. It ain't natural for a boy to be so serious. You weren't, when you first came.

JERRY. That was a big bluff. Take it from me, I never felt more serious in my life. I don't think I'm naturally serious. I don't think any fellow is. I seem to have had a lot of things to kind of sober me off.

MIRANDA. I guess likely you have.

LETTIE *enters, center.*

LETTIE. Good morning, Mirandy.

MIRANDA. Oh, is it you, Lettie?

LETTIE (*looking at* JERRY). How's your new helper?

JERRY (*making* LETTIE *an elaborate bow*). I'm in the best of health, Miss Holbrook.

LETTIE. Well, did I ever? Why won't you never tell us how you found him, Mirandy?

MIRANDA (*trying not to laugh*). Find him? Do you think I went hunting for a chore boy? He came.

LETTIE. From where?

MIRANDA. Barretstown. I've told you all about it before.

LETTIE. Do tell. (*To* JERRY.) My cousin's brother-in-law's sister-in-law, Sarah Mitchell, lives over there. Do you know her?

JERRY. No, ma'am.

LETTIE. Funny if you lived right in the town and didn't know her.

JERRY. I didn't live there very long.

LETTIE. Oh, you didn't? Well, I don't think much o' folks that gallavant from one town to another.

JERRY (*who is anxious to get back at* LETTIE). Well, don't you know—

MIRANDA (*warningly*). Jerry. (*To* LETTIE.) He ain't going to work for you, Lettie. I'm the one that's taking a chance.

LETTIE. I'll say "chance."

LILLIAN *and* MARY *enter hurriedly, center.*

LILLIAN (*breathlessly*). Oh, Miss Miranda! It's too bad. I'm so sorry.

MIRANDA. What is? What's the matter?

MARY (*looking out of the window*). It's too late. Here they are.

LILLIAN. We were going to warn Jerry.

MIRANDA. Warn Jerry?

LETTIE (*very much excited*). What is it? Tell me quick!

JOE PAYSON *enters, center, followed by* JACK.

JOE (*looks at* JERRY). That's your chore boy.

MIRANDA. Good Lord, yes. Is the whole village coming to look at him? A body'd think I had a monkey in a cage.

JOE. Was there a Boston officer up here?

MIRANDA (*calmly*). There was.

LETTIE (*eagerly*). What? An officer? From Boston? And I never see him?

JOE. Did the officer see him? (*Looks toward* JERRY.)

MIRANDA. No; he didn't have to. He didn't answer

the description. I ain't harboring any criminals under my roof, Joe.

JOE. I hope you ain't, Mirandy. But you can't always tell.

LETTIE (*emphatically*). I guess you can't.

MIRANDA (*quietly*). What was it you wanted, Joe?

JOE (*curtly*). I wanted to find out if the officer got him. There's been some money stolen from my safe in the store.

MIRANDA. Well?

LETTIE. There has? For the land——

JOE (*interrupting*). He is the only stranger in town, and if he's the one the officer wants, why it looks kind of suspicious. Don't you think so yourself, Mirandy?

MIRANDA. I suppose you're right, Joe. (*Turns toward* JERRY.) Have you been in this man's store today, Jerry?

JERRY (*promptly*). No, ma'am. You know I haven't.

WHITCOMB *enters, center.*

MIRANDA. Why, deacon.

(*Everyone shows surprise.* JOE *glares at* WHITCOMB. JACK *stands where he is unseen by* WHITCOMB *throughout this scene.*)

WHITCOMB (*ignoring everyone but* MIRANDA *and* JERRY). This is your chore boy, isn't it?

MIRANDA (*exasperated*). Yes, it is. And it's going to cost you ten cents to look at him. If I've got a side show, I'm going to make something on it.

LETTIE. Mirandy Peasley, be you crazy?

JOE. I think I'll be going, Mirandy.

WHITCOMB (*sternly*). Wait a minute, Joe Payson. You got here first. I got something to say, and then I'll be the one to go. I heard you lost some money. I

always intend to do my duty to everyone, no matter whether they are friend or foe. I saw that boy (*indicating* JERRY) climbing out of the back window of your store, not half an hour ago.

(JERRY *glances quickly at* JACK, *who motions to him to remain silent.*)

(*The others exclaim in surprise,* "*What?*" "*You did?*" "*Well, I never!*" *etc.*)

LETTIE. There! (*To* JERRY.) Now what have you got to say to that?

JERRY (*giving* MIRANDA *one glance*). Mercy sakes!

(MIRANDA *smiles. The others all look at* JERRY *in astonishment.*)

LETTIE. Well, did I ever? Why, the boy is a simpleton!

JOE (*somewhat staggered by it all*). That's darned square of you, deacon—

WHITCOMB (*shortly*). We won't discuss that. Come, Lillian. (*Exits, center.* LILLIAN *follows him out the door.*)

JOE (*to* JERRY). Are you willing to be searched?

JERRY. Yes, sir.

JOE. Ain't got it with you, then?

MIRANDA (*warningly*). You can't prove that he ever had it with him.

JOE. He lied about being in the store. Now maybe he can give a reason for being in there—or a reason for climbing out the window. (*To* JERRY.) You want to do any talking?

JERRY. No, sir, I haven't anything to say.

LETTIE (*acidly*). I guess you haven't.

MIRANDA (*to* JOE). You want to have him arrested on suspicion?

JOE. I'm going to find out who's got my money, and I want to know he's where we can get our hands on him if he's guilty.

MIRANDA (*firmly*). I'll answer for it that he'll be right here any time you want him.

LETTIE. As if you could! If he took a notion to run away—

MIRANDA (*ignoring* LETTIE). You want to trust me with him, Joe?

JOE (*grandiloquently*). I'd trust you with anyone or anything, and I hope we find he didn't have anything to do with it. (*To* JERRY.) See to it, young man, that you stand by a woman that's willing to stand by you.

JERRY. You needn't worry, sir. I'll be right here if you want me.

LETTIE (*breaking in*). I don't like his looks!

JOE (*to* JERRY). It would have been better if you hadn't lied about being in the store. Come on, Jack. (*Going to outside door.*) Good-bye, Mirandy.

MIRANDA. Good-bye, Joe.

(JOE *and* JACK *exeunt, center.* MARY *hesitates for a moment, then follows them out.*)

LETTIE (*to* JERRY). Well, a nice mess you're making of things after Mirandy has—

MIRANDA (*gently*). Lettie, I made some gingerbread by your recipe and it didn't come out right. I wish you'd come and look at it. (*Takes* LETTIE *by the hand, leads her to door, right, and gets her into the kitchen.* MIRANDA *turns back and whispers*:) I want to see you as soon as I can get rid of her.

JERRY. Yes, ma'am.

(MIRANDA *exits into kitchen, right.* JERRY *looks after her and draws a long breath*).

JACK *enters hastily, center.*

JACK. I just sneaked back for a second. Say, but you're all wool and a yard wide. (*Admiringly*).

JERRY. Of course you realize how I look in the eyes of your father and all the neighbors—to say nothing of Mrs. Peasley.

JACK. Yes, I do. And I can't thank you enough for keeping still. Of course I'll clear you later. But I can't speak now unless I absolutely have to. They haven't any proof against you.

JERRY. No; but can you beat the circumstantial evidence?

JACK. Being a stranger in the village, you ought not to mind so much what people think, for a while.

JERRY. No, of course it doesn't matter about me. But how about Mrs. Peasley? I didn't think it was so serious. She's been mighty good to me, and I wouldn't hurt her for all the money on earth. But I've promised, and I'll keep my promise—as long as I can.

JACK. Cheer up, kid. I'll call Sherlock Holmes if they get you in dutch. And I solemnly swear to tell the whole story later.

JERRY. All right. Don't forget.

JACK. So long. (*Exits center and back left.* JERRY *walks to the window and stands looking out.*)

MARY *tiptoes in center door from back right.*

MARY (*softly*). Jerry.

JERRY (*turning quickly*). Mary.

MARY. I know.

JERRY. Know what?

MARY. It wasn't you. It was Jack.

JERRY. Gee whiz! How'd you find out?

MARY (*smiling*). I didn't find out. I guessed.

JERRY (*tricked*). Well, can you beat that? How did you ever guess?

MARY (*seriously*). I don't know. Sometimes it's easy. Sometimes something in here (*puts her hand over her heart*) tells you a thing is or is not so. I think it's when it concerns some one you like. And Jerry, I like you. (*Runs out center, and back right.*)

JERRY (*beside himself*). Oh, gee! Can you beat that! Was a fellow ever in such luck! (*Dances around.*)

MIRANDA *enters from the right and regards him in astonishment.*

MIRANDA. So that's the way you feel? I can tell you, I don't.

JERRY. What's going to happen? (*With a chuckle.*) Is this where I get spanked?

MIRANDA. I told you there's some things you'd have to do, and one of them is to tell me the truth. Why did you say you didn't go in the store?

JERRY (*growing serious*). Because that's the truth.

MIRANDA. Your word against Deacon Whitcomb's. And I've known the deacon since I was four years old. Of course, I understand your climbing out the window to escape the constable, but you told me you weren't in the store.

JERRY. I know it looks fierce. I'm terrible sorry. You—you don't think I took that money, do you?

MIRANDA (*distressed*). I don't know what to think. I'm all stirred up.

JERRY. What a darned pity I came. I've just stirred up the whole village and messed things up for you.

MIRANDA. I don't mind that. But I'm so terribly disappointed in you.

JERRY (*drawing a long breath*). Gee! It hurts to have you say that.

MIRANDA. Well, it's true. I'm disappointed enough to cry.

JERRY (*taking a step toward her*). Please, Mrs. Peasley! If you cry—

MIRANDA (*stifling a sob*). I ain't a-going to. I ain't the crying kind. (*Changes to matter-of-fact tone.*) You march yourself out and get to work. And for the land sakes tell Bill Mason to give you enough to do to keep you out of mischief.

JERRY. Yes, ma'am. (*Starts to exit right, with head drooping.*)

MIRANDA (*suddenly*). Jerry! Come back here. (*He turns back. She goes to him.*) You poor young one! (*Very close to tears.*) It's a shame. I don't believe you ever took the money. I don't believe you were in the store at all. The deacon thinks so—but he's mistaken!

JERRY (*joyously*). I've got to do this. I can't help it. (*Gathers her into his arms and holds her tight.*) You're the dearest thing, my little mother. (*Kisses her cheek, then hurries out right.*)

MIRANDA (*feels for her handkerchief and goes to picture*). Land sakes, Hiram, did anyone ever see the like? I'm all worked up over that boy that ain't no relation and I've only known three weeks. I reckon, Hiram, I'm just a natural-born idiot.

JOE *quickly enters center, from back left.*

JOE. Where's that boy?

MIRANDA (*surprised at his manner*). Joe!

JOE. I wanted to save your feelin's before the folks awhile ago, and this matter can be kept between ourselves. (*Looks at her.*) You think a heap of that boy.

MIRANDA (*fearfully, comes center to meet* JOE). Yes, I 'low I do, Joe.

JOE. Well, he's young, and with your influence he may turn out all right. But he's a thief. The deacon saw him.

MIRANDA (*with spirit*). I don't believe it, Joe Payson. Deacon or no deacon, that boy never done no wrong.

JOE. Well, I ain't goin' to beat about the bush. Miranda, I want this farm.

JERRY *enters center from back right. He stands in the doorway quietly listening.*

MIRANDA. Joe Payson, why are you so sot on having this farm?

JOE (*evasively*). That don't make no difference. This Boston party is outbidding me. I can't meet his price. But I want the farm for reasons I ain't a-goin' to tell the whole village.

MIRANDA (*softly*). Joe, I never thought in all my born days that I'd sell this farm. Why, Hiram and I spent our honeymoon here. It was here we passed our happiest days together. My girls was all married from here. But if I do sell, I feel I must let it go to the highest bidder. Somethin' has come up, or I wouldn't sell to no one. But I want the money, Joe.

JOE (*without pity*). Well, I ain't got it. But I'll make a bargain with you. You sell me the farm at my figure and I'll drop the case against the boy.

MIRANDA (*indignantly*). Joe Payson, do you mean—

JOE (*snappily*). Yes, I do. If you don't sell me the farm, the boy goes to prison. He stole one hundred dollars out of my safe, and he'll have to serve time—unless you sell me the farm.

MIRANDA (*astonished*). Joe! Joe Payson!

JOE. Hurry up. Decide, before I ring for the constable. (*Makes a bluff at starting for telephone.*)

MIRANDA. You'll have to prove he done it, Joe, and you can't. He is innocent.

JOE. Ain't the deacon's word enough? He saw him come out of the window. And ain't the boy wanted in Boston? There's not a chance for him. (*Persuasively.*) Come now, Miranda; I have the papers here, and a check. (*Takes out fountain pen and paper.*) Sign here and be done with it. (*Crosses to table.*)

MIRANDA (*in a daze, takes pen and crosses to table*). I 'low I'm beat, Joe. You can have the farm. (*Starts to sign.*)

JERRY (*comes quietly back of table and puts his hand over the paper*). No, he can't.

MIRANDA. Jerry!

JERRY (*takes pen out of her hand and speaks quietly*). Here's your pen and paper, Mr. Payson. (*Gives* JOE *papers and says quickly*). Now you beat it out of here, and make it snappy!

JOE (*takes paper and pen and backs away left, half awed*). What do you mean?

JERRY. I mean that Mrs. Peasley isn't going to sell her farm until she gets good and ready. And when she does, she's going to get what it's worth.

JOE (*recovering*). How dare you talk to me, you thief! Do you know I can send you to jail?

JERRY. Maybe you can, Mr. Payson. But I'll go to jail before I'll see the best friend I have in the world cheated by you.

JOE (*angrily*). "Cheated!"

JERRY (*with rising voice*). Yes, cheated! (*Takes one step toward* JOE.) Why are you so anxious to buy this farm? (*Takes another step.*) Why has a man in Boston tripled your offer for it? (*Comes center.*) I'll

tell you why; because there's to be a Central Railroad run through this property.

JOE (*quickly*). How do you know that?

JERRY. I heard about it while I was working in the *World* office in Boston. Deny it if you can!

JOE (*ugly*). I ain't goin' to deny it. But you'll serve time for this.

JERRY. Maybe I will, Mr. Payson. But be sure you're not playing with a boomerang.

JOE (*uncomfortably*). What do you mean by that?

JERRY. Never mind.

JOE. So you worked for *The World* newspaper in Boston, eh? You admit it. (*Shaking his finger at* JERRY.) Well, I'll have you arrested, and then I'll wire to *The World* in Boston that I've got their man.

MIRANDA (*trembling*). Joe Payson—you leave my house. And don't you never set foot in it again!

JOE (*going up center*). I'm going. But I'm coming back—(*turns and points*) for him. (*Exits center and back left.*)

MIRANDA (*turns, watches* JOE *go, looks at* JERRY, *shakes her head sadly*). Jerry!

JERRY (*puts his arms around her tenderly*). Mother mine.

MIRANDA (*embracing him*). My boy! But don't be afeered. (*Wipes her eyes and smiles.*) The Lord sent you to me, and the Lord will take care of you.

CURTAIN.

MOTHER MINE

The Third Act

The scene is the same. It is two days later than the Second Act. The time is early evening. The outside door is closed. The dining table is partially laid for supper, including a pie, with places for two. A piece of unfinished knitting is on the side stand near the fireplace. An opened letter is on the mantel. The lamp, unlighted, is on the dining table. The candles on the mantel are burning. A fire is glowing in the fireplace.

Stage lights up three-quarters at rise. Blue bunches back of window and center door.

The rise of the curtain reveals Miranda *setting the table for supper. She goes into the kitchen. There is a knock on the outside door, and it is repeated.*

Whitcomb (*off stage, outside center door*). Mirandy.

Miranda *enters from right, with dishes, in time to hear him call.*

Miranda (*calls*). Come in.

Whitcomb *opens the center door, enters and closes the door.*

Whitcomb. Good evening, Mirandy.

Miranda (*putting the dishes on the table*). Oh, it's you, deacon. I thought I heard someone knock. Sit right down.

Whitcomb. No, I just stopped for a minute. I'm late now. You're kind of late with your supper, too. (*Glances at table.*)

Miranda. Yes, Jerry went down to the city today, and he ain't come home yet.

WHITCOMB. Ain't it kind o' risky, goin' his bond? Do you think he'll come back from the city? Suppose he should run away, you'd have to pay that bond. Five hundred dollars is a lot for you to lose, Mirandy.

MIRANDA (*smiles*). I ain't a-going to lose it, deacon.

WHITCOMB. You 'low he'll come back?

MIRANDA. Of course he'll come back.

WHITCOMB. You got wonderful faith in that boy, Mirandy.

MIRANDA. Yes, I guess I see him with the eyes of the heart, deacon.

WHITCOMB. His trial comes off in two weeks, don't it?

MIRANDA. Yes.

WHITCOMB. Well, I'm real sorry I had to be the one to accuse him, Mirandy. For your sake, I hope he'll get off. Perhaps he'll mend his ways with your help. I guess the poor lad has had a pretty rough life, with no one to encourage him to do right.

MIRANDA. Yes, he has, deacon. But I've got faith in him, and no one can make me believe he deliberately done wrong. You was mistaken, deacon.

WHITCOMB. No, no, Mirandy. I see him come out of the window.

MIRANDA. I suppose the whole village is gossiping because I went his bond. They all believe him guilty. But they don't dare say it to me.

WHITCOMB. Any mail lately?

MIRANDA (*takes letter from mantel*). This afternoon. (*Hands it to him.*) Just see the offer he's made; and this time he's coming. What do you think of that?

WHITCOMB (*takes letter from envelope, glances at it and shakes his head*). Must be some truth about the railroad. But anyway, I'm glad you're going to have a look at him. We'll have my lawyer out here when he comes.

MIRANDA. All these letters are from Boston. It's queer we can't find out nothing about him.

WHITCOMB. I've been thinking probably he ain't using his right name. (*Replaces letter on mantel.*)

MIRANDA (*sits by dining table and looks up at him*). That makes it look all the worse. My land, deacon, I'm almost tempted to sell. I'll never get such a chance again. It seems like flying in the face of providence not to accept such an offer.

WHITCOMB (*stands with his back to fireplace, his hands behind him*). We musn't be hasty. I thought you wanted to keep the old place.

MIRANDA. Well, I would like to; but such an offer. I could buy another place and have a small fortune left.

WHITCOMB. Yes, that's right. But we'll be cautious. The railroad will give more.

MIRANDA. Sometimes I wish I had a little more'n I got.

WHITCOMB. Spend too much on the girls?

MIRANDA. No; no indeed. Only I wish I had a little more to spend on someone else.

WHITCOMB. I should think it'd be a pretty good idea for you to have a little more to spend on Miranda Peasley.

MIRANDA. Land sakes, I got enough to spend on myself. I'd never sell if I was the only one to think about.

WHITCOMB. Well, I don't see who else there is now, Mirandy.

MIRANDA (*smiling*). No, I don't suppose you do see.

WHITCOMB. Anyway, you won't do anything rash now you've waited all this time.

MIRANDA. No, I won't. I promise you. And deacon, I'll never forget how kind you've been, helping me about this thing.

WHITCOMB (*going up center*). I don't see that I've done much. We're just as much in the dark as we were when we started. But I hope we'll see some light before we get through. (*Exit center.*)

MIRANDA (*goes to door*). Good night, deacon. (*Takes some knitting from the side table. Sits down in arm chair before fireplace. There is a slight pause.*)

JERRY *enters center, opening the door and closing it after him.*

JERRY. Mother mine!

MIRANDA (*turns quickly*). Jerry! Well, did I ever! If you don't look nice. I declare to goodness, you're handsome as a picture, if I do say it.

JERRY (*pretending to be embarrassed*). Oh, Miss Miranda; how embarrassing! Think it's a good one? (*Goes to her and kneels by her chair.*)

MIRANDA (*feels the cloth of his sleeve*). Yes, it does seem like a real good piece of goods. I declare, I'm prouder'n ever of my boy.

JERRY (*putting his arm around her*). Gee, how you spoil me.

MIRANDA. I ain't worrying. You can stand a whole lot more spoiling.

JERRY (*with his arm still around her, and looking into the fire*). That fire looks good. It's beginning to be cold nights. (*Suddenly jumps up.*) I'm terribly late. I'll get these clothes off and go to work.

MIRANDA. No, I told Bill to do the chores tonight. Everything's done. (*Rises.*) You just sit down and we'll have supper.

JERRY (*putting the chairs around the table*). A regular holiday.

MIRANDA. Well, you deserve it. You work like a dog

all the time. Bill says we never had a man who could do more.

JERRY (*simply*). I am glad if you are pleased. I'm going to make good for you. Oh, I bought you something. It's the best I could find. Sometime we'll have something swell from Boston. (*Takes a little package from his pocket and hands it to her.*)

MIRANDA (*delighted*). Now, Jerry, you oughtn't to spend your money on me. (*Opens package and takes out a small lace collar.*) Well, ain't that handsome! Let's see; how does it go. (*Tries it on.*) There. That's it. Bless your heart. (*Starts to take it off.*)

JERRY. Keep it on. You look just like a little queen.

MIRANDA. Jerry.

JERRY. Well, you do to me, all right. And if I don't look like his royal nibs or something, then I'm no judge. Come on. We'll have supper in state. (*Makes an elaborate bow.*) If your most gracious majesty will permit me— (*Offers her his arm.*)

MIRANDA. Jerry, you a r e the beatenest boy I ever see in my life. Stop your nonsense and let me bring in the tea.

JERRY (*leading her towards the table*). What, madame! You do menial service? Nay! (*Puts her in chair at table and exits, right.*)

MIRANDA (*shaking her head*). Did anyone ever see the like!

JERRY *enters from right with tea.*

JERRY. Gee, I'm hungry. I have an idea I was born that way.

MIRANDA. Light the lamp, Jerry.

JERRY (*lights lamp on center of the table*). Days'll soon be getting shorter, won't they?

MIRANDA (*with a sigh*). Yes, they will. (*They eat*

supper during the following scene.) Jerry, what shall we do after you're cleared of this charge a-hangin' over you?

JERRY. Why, mother mine, I'd like to try to get work in the city. I'd like to take care of you. I can't help dreaming of that little kitchenette.

MIRANDA. Jerry. I've been thinking a lot lately, and I've made up my mind. I'm going to sell the farm.

JERRY. No, not yet. Wait.

MIRANDA. Well, dear, we'll see. But I'm thinking we had better go to Boston.

JERRY (*in surprise*). To Boston?

MIRANDA. Yes. There's nothing to fear. You are innocent, and with the money from the farm we will hire the best lawyer in the country to prove it. Will you go?

JERRY. Yes. With you, I'll face them gladly. I was so all alone before, it made me afraid. I was a coward. But now—with you behind me—gee! But suppose—they convict me. It's only my word, you know.

MIRANDA. They can't, if you're innocent. The Lord will be on our side. But even if you were convicted, I'd wait for you in the little home in Boston. It would be hard to do without you, now I've found you. But I could wait.

JERRY. Oh, you wonderful little mother mine! Yes, I want to go back. I'll write Mr. Crockett I'm coming as soon as I'm free here.

MIRANDA. I 'low Joe Payson has already let them know you're here.

JERRY. Well, I'll wire Mr. Crockett tonight, anyway. My, I feel relieved. It isn't nice to feel that you're hiding, even when you're innocent. Gee, I could shout with joy. I always thought I was unlucky, but

I'm the luckiest fellow in the world—to have found you. Oh, boy! what a love nest of a home we'll have. (*Hugs her.*) Say, I'm going to tell you a secret. You're the first to know it. I know another couple who are going to have a love nest; but not just like ours.

MIRANDA. I want to know. Somebody around here?

JERRY. Yep. Somebody you've been seeing every day. In fact, you've helped their little affair along.

MIRANDA (*astonished*). I—have—helped—(*suddenly startled*). You don't ever in this world mean—?

JERRY. Sure. You've guessed it. Lillian and Jack.

MIRANDA (*with a gasp*). What do you mean?

JERRY. They were married this afternoon.

MIRANDA. I don't believe it.

JERRY. You'd better. Mary and I stood up with them.

MIRANDA. Jerry MacConnell!

JERRY (*grinning*). Present.

MIRANDA. Stop your nonsense before I box your ears. Tell me what you mean.

JERRY. Well, they asked us to see them married, so Mary planned her visit to her cousin, and I planned my trip to town, on the day the great event was to take place.

MIRANDA. I want to know! Clever crowd, aren't you?

JERRY. Oh, so-so. Don't be cross, please. You've helped more than anyone else, yourself.

MIRANDA (*exasperated*). What do you mean, I've helped?

JERRY. Haven't you guessed what they were writing and leaving here every day?

MIRANDA. Jerry! They never—they weren't——!

JERRY. Sure; love letters. They planned the whole thing that way. I supposed you were wise by this time.

MIRANDA. Maybe I oughter been, but I ain't. Well, a nice mess you've all got me into.

JERRY. I haven't done any—

MIRANDA (*interrupting*). Don't talk to me. Take your hat and march down to Deacon Whitcomb's and bring him and Cynthy up here.

JERRY (*aghast*). Oh, please!

MIRANDA. And while you're gone I'll telephone to the store for Joe Payson.

JERRY. Oh, for the love of— Don't tell them now! The Paysons think Jack has gone hunting, and the Whitcombs think Lillian has gone to visit her aunt.

MIRANDA. I want to know! Well, they'll soon know their mistake.

JERRY. Oh, let them have their honeymoon.

MIRANDA (*scornfully*). Honeymoon! When you come back you can stop in and bring Mary along, too.

JERRY. Miss Miranda, please don't drag her into it. Why she's as innocent as—as— (*Pause.*)

MIRANDA. Well, maybe she is. I guess we'll leave Mary out of it if we can. I know she never would have done it if it hadn't been for the rest of you. Jerry, I'm ashamed of you.

JERRY. But—gee whiz, now, little mother. Why shouldn't they get married?

MIRANDA. I ain't saying they shouldn't. It's the underhand way you've all acted.

JERRY. We had to. We couldn't pull it off any other way. Their fathers act like a couple of—

MIRANDA (*sternly*). Jerry! Do you think you are in any position to criticize others?

JERRY (*meets her eyes; his drop*). No, ma'am. (*Draws a long breath.*) Gee, you can hit straight out from the shoulder. I'm sorry. I didn't think you'd care like this. I thought it was a good joke.

MIRANDA. Your idea of a good joke may change before this blows over. You march along to the deacon's.

JERRY (*quietly*). Yes, ma'am. (*Takes his cap and exits, center.*)

MIRANDA (*to the portrait*). Land sakes, Hiram, ain't young folks the beatenest now-a-days? (*Begins to clear dishes from table.* LEWIS *knocks on center door.*) Come in.

LEWIS *opens center door, enters and closes door.*

MIRANDA (*surprised*). Oh—

LEWIS. Good evening, Mrs. Peasley. You don't remember me?

MIRANDA (*puzzled*). Why—I— (*Suddenly, with a gasp.*) Good land, yes. I do.

LEWIS. I was down this way again, and I thought I'd drop in and (*significantly*) finish the family album.

MIRANDA. I want to know!

LEWIS. You don't seem especially pleased to see me.

MIRANDA. Well, you took me by surprise. Set down; do. Been to supper? (*Cuts a piece of pie.*)

LEWIS. Oh, yes. Some time ago. (*Sits by center table.*)

MIRANDA. Well, have a piece of pie. (*Puts pie on a plate.*)

LEWIS. Madam, I never refused a piece of pie in my life. I'm not going to begin now (*she hands him a piece*), especially when it looks like this. (*Starts to eat it.*) Hm! Madam, my hat is off to you. I'm your slave forever.

MIRANDA. That so? (*She eyes him uncertainly and tries to speak carelessly.*) Well, did you find your boy you was looking for when you was down here before?

LEWIS. No, I'm still looking. But I've got him

located this trip. This time I'm going to get my hands on him.

MIRANDA. I want to know. It never pays to be too sure.

LEWIS. What about that boy of yours? Still got the same one?

MIRANDA. Yes.

LEWIS. Where is he tonight?

MIRANDA. I've sent him on an errand.

LEWIS (*smiles*). History repeats itself. Sure it isn't two errands? One down that way and one over this? (*Points left and right.*)

MIRANDA. No, it's only one this time, and I wish to goodness it was clear to California. You may take a notion he's the boy you want. Have some more pie? (*Takes his plate.*)

LEWIS. No, thank you, madam. I only wish I could. I regret my incapacity, I assure you.

(JOE *knocks on center door.*)

MIRANDA. Come in.

JOE *opens door and enters, leaving door open.*

JOE. Good evening, Mirandy.

MIRANDA (*coolly*). Good evening, Joe Payson.

JOE (*to* LEWIS). You here? Hasn't Jerry come yet?

LEWIS. No.

JOE. I told you, Mirandy.

MIRANDA (*indifferently*). Yes, you did so.

LEWIS (*to* MIRANDA). I located your boy down to the city this afternoon and had him arrested. The constable is on his way out here with him now.

MIRANDA (*unperturbed*). I want to know.

JOE (*surprised*). It doesn't seem to worry you.

MIRANDA. It doesn't. But it's real kind of interest-

ing. Was there something special you wanted to see me about, Joe Payson?

JOE. I want to make one more appeal to you to give me the first chance on this farm. I don't think you're treating me right. We've been good neighbors, and you really promised.

MIRANDA. Yes, I know, Joe. But you've been underhanded, and I can't tolorate that.

WHITCOMB *and* CYNTHIA *enter, center, followed by* JERRY.

WHITCOMB. What's the trouble, Mirandy?

MIRANDA. Hasn't Jerry told you?

CYNTHIA. Not a word. Jest that you needed to see us.

MIRANDA (*dryly*). I guess he didn't dare.

LEWIS (*suddenly stepping forward*). Jerry Huckins!

JERRY (*with a gasp of surprise*). Lewis!

LEWIS (*looking at him in astonishment*). Wh—where—look here. Weren't—weren't you arrested this afternoon down to the city?

JERRY. I was not.

LEWIS *steps forward and puts his hand on* JERRY'S *shoulder, just as* LETTIE *enters, center, followed by* MARY *and* MARTHA. *This occurs without any pause in the dialogue.*

LEWIS (*continues*). Well, you're arrested right now.

LETTIE (*triumphantly*). I always knew he would be.

JERRY (*looking at* MIRANDA). I'm sorry, little mother. We were just too late.

LEWIS. By thunder, I'd like to know who's been arrested down to the city. But don't let it worry you. We'll soon know. I'll just wait here until my man Blunt comes.

WHITCOMB. Lettie, you look almost ready to burst. Why don't you lead off?

LETTIE (*indignantly*). Me? I ain't got nothing much to say.

MIRANDA (*dryly*). Well, it's the first time. I don't suppose you come over here for nothing.

MARTHA. No, she didn't. She says Jerry and Mary were riding around together down to the city this afternoon.

LETTIE. Mattie Wilkins was telephoning me, and she says she—she see them.

MARTHA. Mary has just come from her cousin's and she won't say a word. I wish to goodness her father wasn't away for a whole week. I don't know what I'm going to do. I can't make her talk if she won't.

LETTIE. I always said Mary would take up with a crooked stick.

MIRANDA (*sharply*). Be careful who you're calling a crooked stick.

LETTIE. Ain't I just seen him arrested with my own eyes?

MIRANDA. You'll see something else before you get through.

LETTIE. I can tell you something else I've seen that the rest of you ain't. (*Pause.*)

LEWIS. Oh, don't keep us in suspense. Go to it! Don't leave anything out.

LETTIE (*tartly*). I ain't talking to you.

LEWIS. I'm getting the benefit of it just the same. And let me tell you, I know a vaudeville agency that would pay you a fortune to join their circuit.

LETTIE. Do tell! Well, you better recommend Mary. Jerry has been teaching her a lot of new fangled dances out in the barn when they weren't nobody around.

JERRY. That is to say, nobody but Miss Holcomb.

MARTHA (*with a gasp*). It's true, then?

JERRY. Yes, ma'am, it is. It's my fault.

MARY. No, it isn't. It's mine. I asked him to do it.

WHITCOMB (*with a self-satisfied air*). You got to keep your eyes pretty sharp on young folks if you don't want them to get into mischief.

MIRANDA. I don't care how much they've danced. Young folks can't work all the time, even if you people think they oughter. And, deacon, you may have a sharp eye yourself, but just the same, Lillian and Jack were married this afternoon.

WHITCOMB (*amazed*). How do you know?

MIRANDA. I was going to leave Mary out, but I guess we'd better have the whole story. Jerry and Mary stood up for them.

LETTIE. Was there ever such goings on in a village!

LEWIS. Never since Uncle Si signed the pledge.

(BLUNT *knocks on center door.* JERRY *goes to open it.*)

MIRANDA. For the lands sake, who's coming now?

JERRY *opens center door and* BLUNT *steps inside, followed by* JACK *and* LILLIAN. JERRY *closes the door.*

BLUNT (*triumphantly*). Here he is, Lewis. And gosh all scissors, I had a time gettin' him here.

(*General surprise is indicated with exclamations of "Jack!" and "Lillian!"* JACK, *disgusted, stands at one side.* LILLIAN *goes to* CYNTHIA.)

JERRY. My G— (*suddenly looks at* MIRANDA *and puts his hand over his mouth.*) Mercy sakes!

LEWIS. Blunt, you're a star on the job if there ever was one.

BLUNT. I reckon so. And if you knew the time I had gettin' them over here. They was jest married, and they hadn't any idea of comin' along.

LEWIS (*laughs*). You're a genius.

WHITCOMB (*to* LILLIAN). Well, young lady, what have you to say for yourself?

LILLIAN (*half defiantly*). Guess I'll let my husband speak for me, dad.

JACK (*to* JOE). Dad—it seems I'm arrested—

JOE (*quickly*). It's a mistake.

JACK (*decidedly*). Yes, the same mistake the deacon made.

WHITCOMB (*surprised*). What?

JOE. What do you mean?

JACK. I mean you arrested the wrong man. It wasn't Jerry that the deacon saw coming out of your store window, dad. It was I.

LETTIE. Mercy on us!

JOE. Jack, what are you saying?

JACK. It's the truth. I needed the money to get married, so I took my liberty bonds. And the package you missed I'm sure you will find in the back of the safe. I knocked it off the shelf and didn't take time to put it back.

LETTIE (*excitedly*). Jack robbed his own father!

JOE (*savagely*). No, the bonds were his.

WHITCOMB. The mistake was mine.

JACK. Jerry and I were dressed alike. It was the red cap. We both wore one. Natural enough mistake. I'm sorry for all the trouble, dad, and the worry to Miss Miranda. But it seemed the only way.

LETTIE (*triumphantly*). Love laughs at locksmiths!

JACK. And believe me, Jerry is a brick, and I hope I'll always have his friendship. Miss Miranda, will you forgive me?

MIRANDA. Land! You bad boy! But I'm so happy now Jerry is freed of that charge, I'll forgive most anyone.

JACK. Dad! (*Holds out his hand.*) Be a sport!

(JOE *hesitates a moment, then shakes* JACK'S *hand.* LILLIAN *crosses into* CYNTHIA'S *arms.*)

JOE. I suppose, deacon, this makes the breach between us wider than ever. Of course you blame Jack for stealing your daughter.

WHITCOMB. No, I don't. She didn't have to marry him if she didn't want to. I take it she wasn't kidnapped. Now, mother (*turning to* CYNTHIA), it's no use to set there cryin' over this! What we'd better do is to see about getting them home.

LEWIS. Wait. I want you to hear what I have to say about this boy, Jerry.

LETTIE (*eagerly*). Yes, let s wait.

MIRANDA (*puts her arm around* JERRY). He's my boy. You can arrest him if you want to. I'll go to the city and I'll fight for him, if I spend every cent I got on earth. I'll show how much I love him and how much he means to me.

LETTIE. Mirandy Peasley, have ye gone stark mad?

LEWIS (*to* MIRANDA). My dear madam, no need of all this excitement. (*To* JERRY.) Jerry, my boy, I congratulate you on such a friend. If you had only understood, we might have avoided much trouble and delay. Mr. Crockett sent me after you and he's been trying to find you ever since you left. We found out you were innocent, and he wants you to come back to your old position on the paper. If you hadn't run away in such a hurry everything would have been all right. And, Jerry, if you had been guilty, I wouldn't have wanted to make you any trouble. I liked you too well for that.

LETTIE. Well, I want to know!

JERRY (*limply*). Can you beat that?

MIRANDA (*half laughing, half crying*). Jerry! Isn't it just wonderful? (*Turns indignantly to* LEWIS.) And you knew this when you come in here tonight and got me all worked up. I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself!

LEWIS (*with a grin*). You put it over on me. I had to have a come-back.

JERRY. Mother, shake hands with my friend, Mr. Lewis.

MIRANDA (*crosses to* LEWIS). Pleased to meet you. (*They shake hands.*)

LEWIS. And now about a little business of my own. You've received my letters about buying your farm?

MIRANDA (*in surprise*). You?

LEWIS. Yes. The railroad is coming through here. I'll have to give Jerry's friend a square deal. The railroad won't be through for about two years. If you'd like to sell, I'll give you a good price.

MIRANDA. Well, I'll sell you my farm, Mr. Lewis, because you've given me happiness that money can't buy. (*To* JOE.) I'm sorry, Joe, but you'll be gettin' a good price for your land. And now that your children have united the families, you and the deacon had better let bygones be bygones, I say.

CYNTHIA. I say so, too.

WHITCOMB (*to* JACK). You and Lillian come over to the house. Miss Miranda's home isn't any place for us to settle our difficulties.

MIRANDA. No, but it's a good place for something else, deacon.

WHITCOMB (*turns to* JOE *and holds out his hand*). I reckon that's right. Joe, will you come over to the house with our children and talk things over?

JOE (*grasps* WHITCOMB's *hand*). I'd be glad to, deacon.

LETTIE. Well, did anybody ever?

LILLIAN (*runs to her father*). Oh, father. How wonderful!

WHITCOMB (*opens center door*). Coming?

(CYNTHIA, JACK, LILLIAN, JOE *and* WHITCOMB *go out center door, and are closely followed by* MARTHA, LETTIE *and* MARY, *with a brief but hearty "good night." They leave the door open.*)

BLUNT (*about to follow*). Through with me?

LEWIS. Yes, Blunt, you can beat it.

BLUNT. Good night! (*Goes out center door, closing it after him.*)

LEWIS. I'll be going, too. You'll come back to Boston to work, Jerry?

JERRY. Will I? I'll say so. And I can't tell you how much I appreciate your coming down here after me.

MIRANDA. Your friend must stay over night with us, Jerry. We've lots of business to settle. You go down to the Eagle House and get his bag.

JERRY (*delighted*). Sure. Will you, Mr. Lewis?

LEWIS. Do you think I would refuse, Miss—er—Mrs.— (*hesitates*).

MIRANDA. I don't wonder you're mixed. I am Mrs. Peasley. (*Points to portrait.*) That was my husband. But I used to teach school over on the cross-roads and the children all called me Miss Miranda. Have you had any supper, really?

LEWIS. No such luck.

MIRANDA (*starting right*). You come right upstairs with me, and then we'll—

JERRY (*joyously*). Take it from me, she'll give you some feed.

LEWIS (*heartily*). I don't doubt it.

MIRANDA (*to* JERRY, *as she and* LEWIS *go to stairway.*) You go along after his bag.

(MIRANDA *and* LEWIS *exeunt, stairway.*)

JERRY. Yes, ma'am.

MARY *gently opens the center door, comes in and closes it.*

MARY (*softly*). Jerry.

JERRY (*turns and sees her*). Yes, Mary.

MARY. I'm awfully glad.

JERRY. Glad I'm going away?

MARY. No; not that.

JERRY. You've liked to have me around?

MARY. You know I have.

JERRY (*seriously*). Gee, if you knew what that means to me. It's been great to be friends with you. And we h a v e been good friends, haven't we?

MARY. Yes. And I'm proud I'm a friend of yours, Jerry.

JERRY. Proud? Of me?

MARY. Of course I am. And so is Miss Miranda. That's what I meant about being glad. I'm so glad for you and Miss Miranda.

JERRY. Mary, you and Miss Miranda have made me all over. I never knew anyone like you before, and my whole object in life is going to be to make myself worthy of you two. If you are proud of me now—just wait.

MARY. But I'm not going to see you any more.

JERRY. Don't fool yourself. It doesn't take long to get to Tapley Village if a fellow wants to come.

MARY. Do you want to come?

JERRY. Want to come? The only consolation in going is the thought of coming back. Coming back

over and over and over again, until the time comes when I can take you with me.

MARY. Take me?

JERRY. Will you come?

MARY. I'm not sure I know just what you mean.

JERRY. I want to study and work until I am worthy of you. It'll take a good many years, I suppose. But I could work so much harder, and so much better, and be so much happier, if I knew that at the end of those years you might love me just a little.

MARY (*frankly*). You haven't got to wait two minutes for that, Jerry.

JERRY. Mary! And sometime you think you could be my wife?

MARY. Don't make it too many years.

JERRY (*throwing his arms around her*). Sweetheart!

MIRANDA *comes down the stairs.*

MIRANDA (*enters by stairs*). Jerry! What in the name o' common sense?

JERRY. Listen, mother mine. Some day Mary is going to live with us in the love nest.

MIRANDA. I want to know. I ain't a mite surprised. I wonder you don't take her right along now. Young folks don't stop to consider their elders any more.

JERRY (*anxiously*). Don't you like the idea?

MIRANDA (*putting an arm around each*). Do you need to ask me that? As much as I love Mary? As much as I love you?

MARY and JERRY (*together, hugging her*). Little mother!

MARY. Just think! I'm going to live in Boston sometime.

MIRANDA (*smiling*). Yes, I reckon you've loved the right kind of a beau.

MARY. And I'll ride on the elevated.

JERRY. And go to every show in town.

MARY. And I'll have silk petticoats that rustle.

JERRY. And we'll just dance through life together, like this. (*He seizes her and they dance around the room and out the right door.*)

MIRANDA (*looks after them and shakes her head*). Did you ever! Did you ever! (*Turns toward the picture, walks toward it smiling and speaks softly.*) Isn't everything just beautiful, Hiram? I reckon I'm the happiest little mother in the whole world.

CURTAIN.

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